

# PD SHORT STORIES

## JANUARY 2018



"Woman Reading under a Mosquito Net" by Fuhiken Tokikaze (active first half of the 18th century), Japan via The Metropolitan Museum of Art is licensed under CC0 1.0

# THE REINCARNATION OF TAMA

The Project Gutenberg eBook, *Romances of Old Japan*, by Yei Theodora Ozaki  
1920

"Felt within themselves the sacred  
passion of the second life.  
Hope the best, but hold the Present  
fatal daughter of the Past.  
Love will conquer at the last."

TENNYSON

N.B.--It is a common Japanese belief that the soul may be re-born more than once into this world. A Buddhist proverb says:

\_Oya-ko, is-sé\_  
\_Fufu wa, ni-sé\_,  
\_Shu ju wa, sansé\_.

Parent and child for one life;  
Husband and wife for two lives;  
Master and servant for three lives.

Under the strong provocation of the passions of love, loyalty and patriotism, the soul may be reincarnated as many as seven times. The hero Hirose, before Port Arthur in 1904, wrote a poem during the last moments of his life saying that he would return seven times to work for his country.

## THE REINCARNATION OF TAMA

Many years ago in Yedo,[1] in the district of Fukagawa, there lived a rich timber merchant. He and his wife dwelt together in perfect accord, but though their business prospered and their wealth increased as the years went by, they were a disappointed couple, for by the time they had reached middle age they were still unblessed with children. This was a great grief to them, for the one desire of their lives was to have a child.

The merchant at last determined to make a pilgrimage to several temples in company with his wife, and to supplicate the gods for the long yearned-for joy of offspring. When the arduous tour was over they both went to a resort in the hills noted for its mineral springs, the woman hoping earnestly that the medicinal waters would improve her health and bring about the desired result.

A year passed and the merchant's wife at last gave birth to a daughter.

Both parents rejoiced that the Gods had answered their prayers. They reared the child with great care, likening her to a precious gem held tenderly in both hands, and they named her Tama, the Jewel.

As an infant Tama gave promise of great beauty, and when she grew into girlhood she more than fulfilled that promise. Their friends all declared that they had never seen such loveliness, and people compared her to a morning-glory, besprinkled with dew and glowing with the freshness of a summer dawn.

She had a tiny mole on the side of her snowy neck. This was her sole and distinguishing blemish.

Tama, the Jewel, proved a gifted child. She acquired reading and the writing of hieroglyphics with remarkable facility, and in all her studies was in advance of girls of her own age. She danced with grace, and sang and played the *\_koto\_* enchantingly, and she was also accomplished in the arts of flower-arrangement and the tea-ceremony.

When she reached the age of sixteen her parents thought it was time to seek a suitable bridegroom for her. Very early marriages were the custom of the day, and besides that her parents wished to see her happily established in life before they grew older. As she was the only child, her husband would become the adopted son, and thus the succession to the family would be secured. However, it proved exceedingly difficult to find anyone who would meet all their requirements.

Now it happened that near-by in a small house there lived a man by the name of Hayashi. He was a provincial *\_samurai\_*, but for some reason or other had left his Daimio's domain and settled in Yedo. His wife was long since dead, but he had an only son whom he educated in the refinements of the military class. The family was a poor one, for all *\_samurai\_* were trained to hold poverty in high esteem; and to despise trade and money-making.

Both father and son led simple lives and eked out their small patrimony by giving lessons in the reading of the classics and in calligraphy, and by telling fortunes according to the Confucian system of divination. Both were respected by all who knew them for their learning and upright lives.

At the time this story opens the elder Hayashi had just died and the son, though only nineteen years of age, carried on his father's work.

The young man was strikingly handsome. Of the aristocratic type, with long dark eyes, aquiline features and a pale, cream-like complexion, he attracted notice wheresoever he went, and though shabbily dressed he always bore himself with great dignity. He was a musician and played the flute with unusual skill, and the game of *\_go\_*<sup>[2]</sup> was his favourite pastime, a taste which made him very popular with older men.

He often passed the rich merchant's house and Tama, the Jewel, noticed the young man coming and going with his flute. Questioning her nurse, she learned all there was to know about his history, his poverty, his scholarly attainments, his skill as a musician and the recent sorrow he had sustained in the death of his father.

Besides being attracted by his good looks, the beautiful Tama's heart went out in sympathy to the young man in his misfortune and loneliness, and she asked her mother to invite him to the house as her music-master, so that they might play duets together--he performing on the flute to her accompaniment on the \_koto\_.

The mother consented, thinking the plan an excellent one, and the young \_samurai\_ became a frequent visitor in the merchant's house. Tama's father was delighted when Hayashi proved to be an expert at \_go\_, and often asked him to come and spend the evening. As soon as dinner was over the merchant would order the chequer-board to be brought and Hayashi was then invited to try his hand at a game.

In this way the intimacy deepened till by degrees the young man was treated like a trusted member of the family.

The young master and pupil thus meeting day by day, presently fell in love, for heart calls to heart when both are young and handsome and the bond of similar tastes cements the friendship. Choosing themes and songs expressive of love they communicated their sentiments to one another through the romantic medium of music, and the two instruments blended in perfect harmony, the \_koto's\_ accompaniment giving an ardent response to the plaintive melody of the young man's flute, which wailed forth the hopeless passion consuming his soul for the lovely maiden.

[Illustration: Tama's father was delighted when Hayashi proved to be an expert at \_go\_, and often asked him to come and spend the evening]

Tama's parents were totally unaware of all that was happening, but her nurse soon guessed the secret of the young couple. The woman, who loved her charge faithfully and devotedly, could not bear to see her unhappy, and foolishly helped the lovers to meet each other in secret. With these unexpected opportunities they pledged themselves to each other for all their lives to come, and tried to think of some way by which they could obtain the old people's consent to their marriage. But Hayashi guessed that the merchant was ambitious for his daughter, and knew that it was improbable that he would accept a son-in-law as poor and obscure as himself. So he postponed asking for her hand until it was too late.

At this time a rich man whom Tama's parents deemed a suitable match for their daughter presented his proposals, and Tama was suddenly told that they approved of the marriage and that she must prepare for the bridal.

Tama was overwhelmed with despair. That day Hayashi had promised to come and play his favourite game with her father. The nurse contrived that the lovers should meet first, and then Tama told Hayashi of the alliance which had been arranged. Weeping, she insisted that an elopement was the only solution to their difficulties. He consented to escape to some distant place with her that very night. Gathering her in his arms he tried to still her sobbing, and Tama clung to him, declaring that she would die rather than be separated from him.

They were thus surprised by her mother, and their secret could no longer be concealed. Tama was taken from him gently but firmly and shut up like a prisoner in one room. The vigilance of the parents being in this manner rudely awakened, the mother never allowed the girl out of her sight, and Hayashi was peremptorily forbidden the house.

The young man, fearing the wrath of her parents, went to live in another part of the city, telling no one of his whereabouts.

Tama was inconsolable. She pined for her lover and soon fell ill. Her elaborate trousseau and the outfit for the bridal household was complete but the wedding ceremony had to be postponed.

Both parents became very anxious for, as the days went by, instead of getting better their daughter visibly wasted away and sometimes could not leave her bed, so weak did she become. To distract her mind they took her to places of amusement like the theatre, or to gardens noted for the blossoming of trees and flowers. Then finally they carried her to places like Hakone and Atami, hoping that the mineral baths and the change of air and scene would cure her. But it was all to no purpose, Tama grew worse in spite of the devotion lavished upon her. Seriously alarmed, the parents called in a doctor. He declared Tama's malady to be love-sickness, and said that unless she were united to the man she pined for that she might die.

Her mother now begged the father to allow the marriage with Hayashi to take place. Though he was not the man of their choice in worldly position, yet if their daughter loved him, it were better that she should marry him than that she should die.

But now arose a difficulty of which they had not dreamed. Hayashi had moved away no one knew whither, and all their frantic efforts to trace him were fruitless.

A year passed slowly by. When Tama was told that her parents had consented to her marrying her beloved, she brightened up with the hope of seeing him again, and appeared to regain her health for a short time. But as month followed month and he never came, the waiting and the sickening disappointment proved too much for the already weakened frame of the young girl. She drooped and died just as she had attained her seventeenth birthday.

It was springtime when the sad event occurred. Hayashi had never forgotten the beautiful girl nor the vows they had mutually plighted, and he swore never to accept another woman as his wife. He longed for news of Tama, but he realized how imprudent and blameable his conduct had been in entering into a secret love-affair with a young girl, and he feared that her father might kill him were he to return even for a single day to the vicinity. Weakly he told himself that she had in all probability forgotten him by this time and was surely married to the man of her parents' choice.

One fine morning he went fishing on the Sumida river. When evening began to fall he turned homewards. As he sauntered along the river embankment, the water lapping softly and dreamily at his feet, he was suddenly startled to see a girlish form coming towards him in the wavering shadows of declining day. Light as a summer zephyr she glided from under the arches of the blossom laden cherry-trees with the sunset flaming behind her. He remembered long afterward that she had seemed rather to float over the ground than to walk.

To his utter astonishment he at once recognized Tama, and his heart leapt with joy at sight of her. After the first salutations he looked at her closely and congratulated her on her good health and ever-increasing beauty. He then asked her to tell him all that had happened since they were cruelly parted.

In the saddest of tremulous voices Jewel answered: "After you left the house my old and devoted nurse was dismissed for having helped us to meet in secret. From that day to this I have never seen her, but she sent me word that she had returned to her old home."

"Then you are not married yet?" asked Hayashi, his heart beating wildly with hope as he interrupted her.

"Oh, no," replied Tama, looking at him strangely, "do you think that I could ever forget you? You are my betrothed forever, even after death. Do you not know that the dread of that marriage being forced upon me and my pining for you made me ill for a long time. Sympathizing with my unhappiness, my parents broke off my engagement and then tried to find you. But you had entirely disappeared leaving no trace behind. To-day I started out, resolved to find you with the help of my old nurse. I am on my way to her now. How happy I am to find you thus. Will you not take me to your house and show me where you live?"

[Illustration: He was suddenly startled to see a girlish form coming towards him in the wavering shadows]

She then turned and walked with him as he led the way to their humble dwelling. Now that her parents had consented to her marrying him they need not wait long, he told himself. How fortunate he was that he should have gained such faithful and unchanging love as that of his beautiful Tama.

As they went along exchanging blissful confidences as to their undying love for one another, he told her of his oath never to wed another woman for her dear sake.

They entered the house together, the nearness of her sweet presence thrilling him to his finger-tips. Impatiently he knelt to light the lamp, placed ready on his low writing table, then with joy inexpressible at the anticipation of all that the future held for them, he turned to speak to her.

But to his utter bewilderment Tama was gone. He searched the house and garden, and with a lantern went and peered down the road, but she was nowhere to be seen. She had vanished as suddenly and mysteriously as she had appeared.

Hayashi thought the incident more than strange; it was eerie in the extreme. Returning alone to his empty room, he shivered as a chill of foreboding seemed to penetrate his whole being, withering as with an icy breath the newly awakened impulses of hope and longing. A thousand recollections of his love crowded upon him, and kept him tossing uneasily upon his pillow all through the night. With the first break of dawn he was no longer able to control his feverish anxiety for news of her, and rising hurriedly, he at once set out for Fukagawa.

Eagerly he hastened to the house of an old friend to make inquiries regarding the merchant's family and especially about Tama. To his dismay he learned that she had passed away but a few days before, and listened with an aching heart to the account of her long illness. And he knew that she had died for love of him.

He returned to his home stupefied with grief and tormented with self-reproach.

"Oh, Tama! Tama! My love!" he cried aloud in his anguish, as he threw himself down in his room and gave way to his despair. "Had I but known of your illness I would have come to you. It was your spirit that appeared to me yesterday. Oh! come to me again! Tama! Tama!"

For weeks he was ill, but when he recovered and was able to think collectedly, he could not endure to live longer in such a world of misery. He felt that he was responsible for the untimely death of the young girl. To escape from the insupportable sorrows of life he decided to enter a Buddhist monastery, and joined the order of itinerant monks called Komuso.<sup>[3]</sup>

Like the monks in the middle ages in Europe the Komuso enjoyed sanctuary. They were chiefly samurai who wished to hide their identity. Sometimes a breach of the law, such as the killing of a friend, obliged the samurai to cut the ties which bound him to his Daimio; sometimes a family blood-feud forced him to spend his years in

tracking down his enemy; sometimes it was disgust of the world, sorrow or disappointment, as in the case of Hayashi: these various reasons often caused men to bury themselves out of remembrance in the remote life of these wandering monks.

The Komuso were always treated with great respect, they enjoyed the hospitality of inns and ships, and a free pass unquestioned across all government barriers.

They wore the stole but not the cassock, and they did not shave their heads like the priesthood. They were distinguished by their strange headgear, which was a wicker basket worn upside down, reaching as far as the chin and completely hiding the face. The rules of their order forbade them to marry, to eat meat, or to drink more than three cups of wine, and when on duty they might not take off their hats or bow to anyone, even to their parents. Outside these restrictions, though nominally priests, their lives were practically those of laymen, and when not on service they spent their time much as they liked in practising the military arts or in study.

As a mental discipline the Komuso were under obligation to go out daily to beg for alms, holding a bowl to receive whatever was bestowed upon them. They affected flute playing. This instrument was cut from the stem nearest the root, the strongest part of the bamboo, and was thus able to serve a double purpose. It gave the monk, who carried nothing with him, the means of earning his daily food, and when necessary was used as a weapon in self-defence.

Hayashi, being skilful with his flute, chose the life of the Komuso as being the best suited to him.

Before leaving Tokyo he visited the temple where his lost love was buried and knelt before her tomb. He dedicated his whole life to praying for the repose of her soul and for a happier rebirth. Her kaimyo (death-name) he inscribed on heavy paper, and wheresoever he went he carried this in a fold of his robe where it crossed his breast. It was, and still is, the custom of the Komuso to perform upon the flute as a devotional exercise at religious services.

As each year came round he always made his way to some tranquil spot and rested from his penitential wanderings on the anniversary of the death of Tama.

Staying in an isolated room he then set up her kaimyo in the alcove, and placing an incense burner before it, kindled the fragrant sticks and kept them alight from sunrise to sunset. Kneeling before this temporary altar he took out his flute, and pouring the passionate breath of his soul into the plaintive, quivering notes, he reverently offered the music to her sweet and tender spirit, remembering the delight she had always taken in those melodies before the blossom of their love had been defrauded of its fruit of consummation by the



blighting blast of interference.

[Illustration: Hayashi visits the temple where his lost love was buried, and dedicates his whole life to praying for the repose of her soul.]

And gradually, as time went by, the burden of sorrow and the tumult of remorse slipped from his soul, and peace and serenity, the aftermath of suffering, came to him at last.

He roamed all over the country for many years, and finally his journeyings brought him to the mountainous province of Kosshu. It was nightfall when he reached the district and he lost his way in the darkness. Worn out with fatigue, he began to wonder where he should pass the night, for no houses were to be seen far or near, and everywhere about him there was nothing but a heaping of hills and a wild loneliness.

For hours he strayed about, when at last, peering into the gloom far up on the mountain side, a solitary light gleamed through the heavy mists. Greatly relieved he hastened towards it.

As soon as he knocked at the outer door of the cottage a ferocious looking man appeared. When the stranger asked for a night's shelter he morosely and silently showed him into the single room which, flanked by a small kitchen, comprised the whole dwelling. Hayashi, furtively gazing round him, noticed that there were no industrial implements to be seen, but that in one corner were standing a sword and a gun.

The host clapped his hands. In answer to the call a young girl of about fifteen years of age appeared. He ordered her to bring the brazier and some food for the guest. Then arming himself with his weapons, he left the house.

The damsel waited on Hayashi attentively, and as she went to and fro from the kitchen she often glanced appealingly at him. Her attitude was that of one frightened in submission, and Hayashi wondered how she came to be there, for, though begrimed with work, he could see that she was fair and comely, and her deportment was superior to her surroundings.

When they were left alone the girl came and knelt before him, and bursting into tears sobbed out "Whoever you may be I warn you to escape while there is yet time. That man whose hospitality you have accepted is a brigand and he will probably kill you in the hope of plunder."

Hayashi, with his heart full of compassion for the young girl, asked her how it was that she came to be living in so wild and desolate a place, and the tale she told him was a pitiful one of wrong.

"My home is in the next province," she said, as she wiped away the tears with her sleeve. "Just after my father's death this robber

entered our house and demanded money of my mother. As she had none to give him he carried me away, intending to sell me into slavery. Soon after he brought me to this house, he was wounded on a marauding expedition, and has since been confined to the house for a month. Thus it is that you find me here still. But he is now recovered and able to go out once more. I implore you to take me with you, otherwise I shall never see my mother again and my fate will be unendurable."

Being of a chivalrous nature Hayashi's heart burned within him at the sad plight of the little maid, and catching her up he fled out of the robber's den into the night.

After some time, when well away from the place, he set her down and they walked steadily all night. By dawn they had crossed the boundary of Kosu and entered the neighbouring province. Once on the high road the district was familiar to the girl and she gladly led the way to her own home.

The delight of the sorrowing mother on finding her kidnapped child restored to her was great and unrestrained. She fell at his feet in a passion of gratitude and thanked him again and again.

In the meantime the rescued girl came to thank her deliverer. Hayashi gazed at her in astonishment. Her appearance had undergone an extraordinary transformation. No longer the forlorn, neglected drudge of the day before, a beautiful girl stood before him. And wonder of wonders! She was the living image of what his lost Tama had been years ago. The tide of the past swept over him with its bitter-sweet memories, leaving him speechless and racked with the storm of his feelings. Not only was the likeness forcibly striking, but he also beheld a little mark, the exact replica of the one he so well remembered on Tama's snowy neck.

He had thought that in the long years of hardship and renunciation of the joys of life the tragic love of his youth lay buried, but the shock of the unmistakable resemblance left him trembling.

In a few minutes he was able to control his emotion and the power of speech returned to him.

"Tell me," he said, turning to the mother, "have you not some relatives in Tokyo? Your daughter is like one whom I knew many years ago, but who is now dead."

The woman regarded him searchingly and after a few moments of this close scrutiny, she inquired:

"Are you not Hayashi who lived in Fukagawa fifteen years ago?"

He was startled by the suddenness of the question, which showed that his identity was revealed and that she knew of his past. He did not

answer but searched his brain, wondering who the woman could possibly be.

Seeing his embarrassment she continued, now and again wiping the tears from her eyes: "When you came to the house I thought that your voice was in some way quite familiar to me, but you are so disguised in your present garb that at first I could not recall who you were.

"Fifteen years ago I served in the house of the rich timber merchant in Fukagawa and often helped O Tama San[4] to meet you in secret, for I felt great sympathy with you both, and if a day passed without her being able to see you, Oh! she was very unhappy. Her parents were furious at the unwise part I had played and I was summarily dismissed. I returned home and was almost immediately married. Within a year I gave birth to a little daughter. The child bore a striking resemblance to my late mistress and I gave her the name of Jewel in remembrance of the beloved charge I had nursed and tended for so many years. As she grew older not only her face and figure, but her voice and her movements all vividly recalled O Tama San. Is not this an affinity of a previous existence that my child should be saved by you who loved the first Tama?"

Then Hayashi, who had listened with rapt attention to the woman's strange story, asked her the date of the infant's birth.

Marvellous to relate it was the very day and hour, for ever indelibly engraven on his memory, that Tama, his first love, had appeared to him on the bank of the Sumida river in the springtide fifteen years ago.

When he told her of this uncanny meeting the woman said that she believed her daughter, the second Tama, to be the re-incarnation of the first Tama. The apparition he had seen was the spirit of his love who had thus announced her rebirth into the world to him. There could be no doubt of this, for had not Tama told him herself that she was on her way to her old nurse. So strong was the affinity that bound them to each other that it had drawn Tama from the spirit-land back to this earth.

"Remember the old proverb, \_the karma-relation is deep\_, " she added in conclusion.

Later on she besought Hayashi to marry the second Tama, for she believed that only in this way would the soul of the first Tama find rest.

But Hayashi, thinking that the great difference in their present ages was an obstacle to a happy union, refused on the score that he was too old and sad a man to make such a young bride happy. He decided, however, to stay on in the little household for a while, and to give any possible comfort and help to the old nurse whose loyal devotion to her mistress had figured so prominently and fatefully in his past.

Thus several months elapsed, bringing with them great and radical changes in the land. The Restoration came to pass, and the new regime was established with the Emperor instead of the Shogun at the helm of State. Schools were founded all over the country, and amongst many other old institutions the order of the \_Komuso\_ monks, to which Hayashi belonged, was abolished by an edict of State.

Hayashi, during his stay in the village, had won his way into the hearts of the people and they now begged him to remain as teacher in the new school, a position for which he was peculiarly fitted by the classical education he had received from his father. He consented to the proposition which solved the problem of his future, for under the new laws it was forbidden him to return to his old life.

The mayor of the place was also much attracted by Hayashi's superior character and dignity, and learning of the sad and romantic history of his past, and believing, as all Japanese do, in predestined affinities, persuaded him that it was his fate, nay more, a debt he owed to the past, to marry Tama, the second, the re-incarnation of his first love.

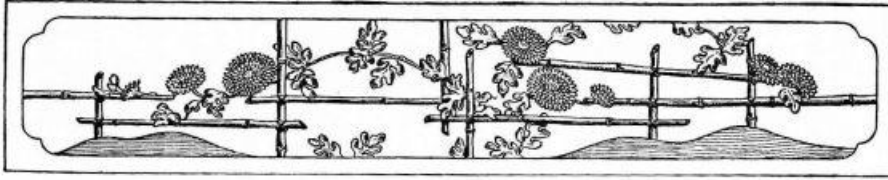
The marriage proved a blessed one. The house of Hayashi prospered from that day forth and as children were born to them the joy of their lives was complete.

[Footnote 1: The old name for Tokyo.]

[Footnote 2: \_Go\_, a game played with black and white counters--more complicated than chess.]

[Footnote 3: The sect was introduced from China in the Kamakura epoch (1200-1400), but it never became popular in the land of its adoption. Under the Tokugawa Government (1700-1850) the \_Komuso\_ were used as national detectives, but the privileges they enjoyed led to the abuse of the order by bad men, and it was abolished at the time of the Restoration. Later on the edict was rescinded, and these men in their strange headgear may be seen to this day fluting their way about the old city of Kyoto.]

[Footnote 4: In speaking women use the polite forms of speech, whereas men drop them. The "O" is the honorific prefix to a woman's name and "San" or "Sama" is the equivalent of Mr. Mrs. or Miss according to the gender of the name. Nowadays high-class women drop the "O" before their individual names, but add "Ko" after them. For instance, the name O Tama San would now be Tama-Ko San.]



## A RE-INCARNATION

The Project Gutenberg eBook, *Grey Roses*, by Henry Harland  
1911

We were, according to our nightly habit, in possession of the Café des Souris--dear Café des Souris, that is no more; and our assiduous patronage rumour alleges to have been the death of it--we were in possession of the Café des Souris, a score or so of us, chiefly English speakers, and all votaries of one or other of the 'quatre-z-arts,' when the door swung open, and he entered.

Now, the entrance of anybody not a member of our particular \_cénacle\_ into the Café des Souris, we, who felt (I don't know why) that we had proprietary rights in the establishment, could not help deeming somewhat in the nature of an unwarranted intrusion; so we stopped our talk for an instant, and stared at him: a man of medium stature, heavily built, with hair that fell to his shoulders, escaping from beneath a broad-brimmed, soft felt hat, knee breeches like a bicyclist's, and, in lieu of overcoat, a sort of doublet, or magnified cape, of buff-coloured cloth.

He supported our examination, and the accompanying interval of silence, which ordinary flesh and blood might have found embarrassing, with more than composure--with, it seemed to me, a dimly perceptible, subcutaneous smile, as of satisfaction--and seated himself at the only vacant table. This world held nothing human worthy to rivet our attention longer than thirty seconds, whence, very soon, we were hot in debate again. It was the first Sunday in May; I need hardly add that our subject-matter was the \_Vernissage\_, at which the greater number of us had assisted.

For myself, however, I could not forbid my gaze to wander back from time to time upon the stranger: an indulgence touching which I felt the less compunction, in that he had (it was a fair inference) got himself up with a deliberate view to attracting just such notice. Else why the sombrero and knickerbockers, the flowing locks and eccentric yellow cloak? Nay, I think it may have been in part this very note of undisguised vanity in the man that made it difficult to keep one's eyes off him: it tickled the sense of humour, and challenged the curiosity. What would his state of mind be, who, in the dotage of the Nineteenth Century, went laboriously out of his way to cultivate a fragmentary resemblance to--say a spurious Vandyke?

As the heat of the room began to tell upon him, he threw aside his

outer garment, and hung up his hat, thereby discovering a velvet jacket and a very low-cut shirt, with unstarched rolling collar, and sailor's knot of pale green Liberty silk. His long hair, of a faded, dusty brown, was brushed straight back from his forehead, and plastered down upon his scalp, in such wise as to lend him a misleading effect of baldness. He wore a drooping brown moustache, and a lustreless brown beard, trimmed to an Elizabethan point. His skin was sallow; his eyes were big, wide apart, of an untransparent buttony brilliancy, and in colour dully blue. Taken for all in all, his face, deprived of the adventitious aids of long hair and Elizabethan beard, would have been peculiarly spiritless and insignificant, but from the complacency that shone like an unguent in every line of it, as well as from the studied picturesqueness of his costume, it was manifest that he posed as a unique and interesting character, a being mysterious and romantic, melancholy and rarely gifted--like the artist in a bad play.

Artist, indeed, of some description, I told myself, he must infallibly be reckoned. What mere professional man or merchant would have the heart to render his person thus conspicuous? And the hypothesis that might have disposed of him as a \_model\_ was excluded by the freshness of his clothes. A poet, painter, sculptor, possibly an actor or musician--anyhow, something to which the generic name of artist, soiled with all ignoble use, could more or less flatteringly be applied--I made sure he was; an ornament of our own English-speaking race, moreover, proclaimed such by the light of intelligence that played upon his features as he followed our noisy conversation; and, at a guess, two or three-and-thirty years of age.

'Anybody know the duffer with the hair?'

This question, started by Charles K. Smith, of Battle Creek, Michigan, U.S.A., and commonly called in the Latin Quarter by his sobriquet of \_Chalks\_, went our rounds in an undertone; and everybody answered, 'No.'

'What is it? Can it talk? 'Pears like it can hear and catch on,' was Chalks's next remark. 'Shall we work the growler on it?'

The process termed by Chalks 'working the growler' was of ancient institution in the Café des Souris; and I believe it is not unknown in other seats of learning--a custom handed down from generation to generation of students, which, like politeness, costing little, yields generous returns. Should a casual wayfarer, happening amongst us, so far transgress the usages of good society as to volunteer a contribution to our talk, without the preliminary of an introduction, it was the rule instantly to require him to offer the company refreshments; and, I am sorry to have to add, not infrequently, being thirsty, and possessing a lively appreciation of the value of our own money, we would, by a marked affability of bearing, by smiles, nods, glances of sympathetic understanding, or what not, designedly

encourage such an one to address us, and so render himself liable to our impost.

'If we don't,' continued Chalks, 'it will be to fly in the face of Providence. The man is simply bursting to fire his mouth off. He's had something to say swelling in him for the last half-hour. It will be an act of Christian mercy to let him say it. And for myself, I confess I'm rather dry.'

Chalks doubtless argued from the eager eye with which the man regarded us; from the uneasy way in which he held his seat, shifting in it, and edging in our direction; and from the tentative manner in which he occasionally coughed.

Now, persuaded by the American, we one by one fell silent, to give our victim his opportunity; whilst those nearest to him baited the trap by looking enquiringly at his face.

It was all he needed.

'I beg your pardon,' he began, with no symptom of diffidence, 'but I too was at the \_Vernissage\_ to-day, and some of your comments upon it have surprised me.' He spoke with a \_staccato\_ north-country accent, in a chirpy, querulous little voice; and each syllable seemed to chop the air, like a blow from a small hatchet. 'Am I to take it that you are serious when you condemn Bouguereau's great picture as a \_croûte\_? \_Croûte\_, if I mistake not, is equivalent to the English \_daub\_?'

Our one-armed waiter, Pierre, had but awaited this crisis to come forward and receive our orders. When they were delivered Chalks courteously explained the situation to the neophyte, adding that, as a further formality, he must make us acquainted with his name and occupation.

He accepted it in perfectly good part. 'I'm sure I shall feel honoured if you will drink with me,' he said, and settled the reckoning with Pierre.

'Name? Name?' a dozen of us cried in scattering chorus.

'I had thought that, among so many Englishmen and Americans, some one would have recognised me,' he replied. 'I am Davis Blake.'

He said it as one might say, 'I am Mr. Gladstone'--or Lord Salisbury--or Bismarck--with dignity, with an inflection of conscious greatness, it is true, but with neither haughtiness nor ostentation. We, however, are singularly ignorant of contemporary English literature in the Latin Quarter--our chief reading matter, indeed, being Maupassant and \_Le Petit Journal pour Rire\_--and though, as we shortly learned, here was a writer whose works were for sale at every

bookstall in the United Kingdom, lavishly pirated in the United States, and distributed far and wide by Baron Tauchnitz on the Continent, his announcement left us unenlightened.

'Painter?' demanded Chalks.

A shadow crossed his face. 'You are surely familiar with my name?'

'Never heard it that I know of,' answered Chalks; then, raising his voice, 'Any gentleman present ever heard of--what did you say your name was?' he asked in an aside; and being informed, went on, 'of Mr. Davis Blake?'

No one spoke.

'Mud?' queried Chalks.

'Mud?' repeated Mr. Blake, perplexed.

'He means to enquire whether you are a sculptor,' ventured I.

'A sculptor--certainly not.' He spoke sharply, throwing back his head. 'It is impossible that no one here should have heard of me; and this pretence of ignorance is meant as a practical joke. I am a novelist--one of the best known novelists living. I am Davis Blake, the author of "Crispin Dorr," and "The Card Dealer." My portrait, with a short biographical sketch, appeared in the Illustrated Gazette not a month ago. My works have been translated into French, German, Russian, and Italian. Of "The Card Dealer," upwards of thirty thousand copies have been sold in Great Britain alone.'

'Ah, then you could well afford to stand us drinks,' was Chalks's cheerful commentary. 'We ain't much on book-learning, this side the river, Mr. Blake. We're plain blunt men, that ain't ashamed of manual labour--horny-handed sons of toil, in short. But we're proud to meet a cultivated gentleman like yourself, all the same, and can appreciate him when met.'

Blake laughed rather lamely, and responded, 'I perceive that you are a humorist. Your countrymen are great admirers of my writings; of "Crispin Dorr," I am told, there are no fewer than three rival editions in the market; and I have received complimentary letters and requests for my autograph, from all parts of the United States, I think that the quality of American humour has been over-rated: but I can forgive a jest at my own expense, provided it be not meant in malice.'

'Every novice in our order, sir,' said Chalks, 'must approve his mettle by undergoing something in the nature of an initiatory ordeal. We may now drop foolery, and converse like intelligent human beings. You were asking our opinion of Willy's daub----'



'Willy?' questioned Blake.

'Ay--Bouguereau. Isn't his front name William?' And Chalks, speaking as it were *ex cathedra*, made very short work indeed of Monsieur Bouguereau's claims to rank as a painter. Blake listened with open-eyed wonder. But we are difficult critics, we of the Paris art schools, between the ages of twenty and twenty-five; cold, cynical, suspicious as any Old Bailey judge; and rare is the man whose work can sustain our notice, and get off with lighter censure than '*croûte*' or '*plat d'épinards*.' We grow more lenient, however, as we advance in years. Already, at thirty, we begin to detect signs of promise in other canvases than our own. At forty, conceivably, we shall even admit a certain degree of actual merit.

By and by, Chalks having concluded his pronouncement, and drifted to another corner of the room, Blake and I fell into separate talk.

'I must count it a piece of exceptional good fortune,' he informed me, 'to have made the acquaintance of your little *coterie* this evening. I am on the point of writing a novel, in which it will be necessary that my hero should pass several years as a student in the Latin Quarter; and I have run over from London for the especial purpose of collecting local colour. No doubt you will be able to help me with a hint or two as to the best mode of setting about it.'

'I can think of none better than to come here and live for a while,' said I.

'I only arrived last night, and I put up at the Grand Hotel. But it was quite my intention to move across the river directly I could find suitable lodgings. Do you know of any that you could recommend?'

'If you want to see student life *par excellence*, you can scarcely improve upon the shop I'm in myself--the Hôtel du Saint-Esprit, in the Rue St. Jacques.'

And after he had examined me in some detail touching that house of entertainment, 'Yes,' he said, 'then, if you will bespeak a room for me there, I'll come to-morrow and stop for a week or ten days.'

'A week or ten days?' I questioned.

'I can't spare more than a fortnight. I must be back in town by the 20th.'

'But what can you hope to learn of Latin Quarter customs in a fortnight? One ought to live here for a year, at the very least, before attempting to write us up.'

'Ah,' he rejoined, shaking his head and gazing dreamily at something

invisible beyond the smoky atmosphere of the café, 'a man with dramatic insight can learn as much in a fortnight as an ordinary person in half a lifetime. Intuition and inspiration take the place of the note-book and the yard-stick. The author of *The Merchant of Venice* had never visited Italy. In "Crispin Dorr" I have described a tempest and a shipwreck at which old sailors shudder: and my longest voyage has been from Holyhead to Kingstown. Besides,' he added, with a bow and smile, 'for the Latin Quarter, if you will take me under your protection, I shall, I am sure, benefit by the services of a capital cicerone.'

And the next afternoon he arrived. I met him at the threshold of the hotel, introduced him to our landlady, Madame Pamparagoux (who stared rather wildly, not being accustomed to see her lodgers so mediævally attired), and showed him upstairs to the room I had engaged.

There he invited me to be seated while he unpacked his portmanteau and put his things in order. These, I noticed, were un-Britishly few and simple. I could discern no vestiges of either sponge or tub. As he moved backwards and forwards between his chest of drawers and dressing-table, he would cast frequent affectionate glances at his double, now in the glass of the *armoire*, now in that above the chimney. He was favouring me meantime with a running monologue of an autobiographical complexion.

'I am a self-educated man. My father was a wine merchant in Leeds. At sixteen he put me to serve in the shop of a cousin, a print-seller. It was there, I think, that my literary instincts awoke. I contributed occasional art notes to a local paper. At twenty I came up to London and began my definite career, as a reporter. I was soon earning thirty shillings a week, which seemed to me magnificent. But I aspired to higher things. I felt within me the stirrings of what I could not help believing to be genius--true genius. I longed to distinguish myself, to emerge from the crowd, from the background, to make myself remarked, to do something, to be somebody, to see my name a famous one. I was fortunate enough at this epoch to attract the notice of X---, the poet. He believed in me, and encouraged me to believe in myself. It is one of the regrets of my life that he died before I had achieved my celebrity. However, I have achieved it. My name is a household word wherever the English language is read. I have written the only novels of my time that are sure to live. They will live not only by virtue of their style and matter, but because of a quality they possess which I must call *universal*--a quality which appeals with equal force to readers of every rank, and which will procure for them as wide a popularity five hundred years hence as they enjoy to-day. I call them novels, but they are really prose-poems. The novel,' he continued, rising for an instant to impersonal heights, 'the novel is the literary form or expression of my period, as the drama was that of Shakespeare's, the epic of Homer's. Do you follow me? Ah, here is a copy of "Crispin Dorr"--here is "The Card Dealer." Take them and read them, and return them when you have finished. Being

author's copies, they possess an exceptional value. This is my autograph upon the fly-leaf. This is a photograph of my wife. She is a good woman, but has no great literary culture, and we are not so happy together as I could wish. Men of commanding parts seldom make good husbands, and I committed the imprudence of marrying very young. My wife, you see, belongs to that class of society from which I have risen. I am the son of a wine merchant, yet I dine with peers, and have been favoured with smiles from peeresses. My wife has not kept pace with me. This is my little girl--our only child--my daughter Judith. Here is the Illustrated Gazette with the portrait of myself.'

Some of us in the Latin Quarter found the man's egotism insupportable, and gave him a wide berth. Others, more numerous, among them the irrepressible Chalks, made it an object of derision, and would exhaust their ingenuity in efforts to lead him on, and entice him into more and more egregious exhibitions of it; while, if they did not laugh in his face, they took, at least, no slightest pains to conceal their jubilant interchange of winks and nudges.

'If he were only an ass,' Chalks urged, 'one might feel disposed to spare him. A merciful man is merciful to a beast. But he's such a cad, to boot--bandying his wife's name about the Latin Quarter, telling Tom, Dick, and Harry of their conjugal differences, and boasting of his successes with other women!'

A few of us, however, could not prevent an element of pity from tincturing our amusement. If his self-conceit was comical, by reason of its candour, it was surely pitiable, because of the poor, dwarfed starveling of a soul that it revealed. Here was a man, with life in his veins, and round about him the whole mystery and richness of creation--and he could seriously think of nothing save how, by his dress, by his speech, his postures, to render himself the observed of all observers!

Wherever he went, in whatever company he found himself, that was the sole thing he cared for--to be the centre of attention, to be looked at, listened to, recognised and admired as a celebrity. And if the event happened otherwise, if he had ground for the suspicion that the people near him were suffering their minds to wander to another topic, his face would darken, his attitude become distinctly one of rancour. With Chalks, familiarity bred boldness; he made the latter days of Blake's sojourn amongst us exceedingly unhappy.

'Now, Mr. Blake,' he would say, 'we are going to talk of art and love and things in general for a while, to rest our brains from the author of "Crispin Dorr." Please step into the corner there and sulk.'

And he had a bit of slang, which he set to a bar of music, and would sing, as if in absence of mind, whenever the conversation lapsed, to the infinite annoyance of Mr. Blake:--

'Git your hair cut--git your hair cut--git your hair cut--\_short\_!'

'If that is meant for me,' Blake once protested, 'I take it as discourteous in the last degree.'

'My dear sir, you were twenty thousand leagues from my thoughts. And as for getting your hair cut, I beseech you, don't. You would shear away the fabric of our joy,' Chalks answered.

Blake had a curiously exaggerated notion of his fame; and his jealousy thereof surpassed the jealousy of women. He took it for granted that everybody had heard of him, and bridled, as at a personal affront, when he met any one who hadn't. If you fell into chance talk with him, in ignorance of his identity, he could not let three minutes pass without informing you. And then, if you appeared not adequately impressed, he would wax ill-tempered. He was genuinely convinced that his person and his actions were affairs of consuming interest to all the world. To be something, to do something, perhaps he honestly aspired; but to seem something was certainly his ruling passion.

One Sunday afternoon, at his suggestion, we went together to the studio of Z---, and I introduced him to the Master. But, as we moved about the vast room, among those small, priceless canvases, the consciousness grew upon me that my companion was in some distress of mind. His eye wandered; his utterances were brief and dry. At length he got me into a corner, and remarked, 'You introduced me simply as Mr. Blake. He evidently doesn't realise who I am.'

'Oh, these Frenchmen are so indifferent to things not French, you know,' said I.

'Yes--but--still--I wish you could make an occasion to let him know. In introducing me you might have added "a distinguished English author."'

'But do you quite realise who he is?' I cried. 'He's jolly near the most distinguished living painter.'

'Never mind. He is treating me now as he might Brown, Jones, or Robinson.' As this was with a superfine consideration, it seemed unreasonable to demand a difference. Nevertheless, I seized an opportunity to whisper in the Master's ear a word or two to the desired effect. 'Tiens!' he returned composedly, and continued to treat his visitor precisely as he had done from the beginning.

Blake had announced that he wanted to gather information about the Latin Quarter; and I don't doubt that his purpose was sincere, but he employed a novel method of attaining it. We took him everywhere, we showed him everything; I could never observe that he either looked or listened. He would sit (or stand or walk), his eye craving admiration

from our faces; his tongue wagging about himself; his early hardships, his first success, his habits of work, his troubles with his wife, his liaison with Lady Blank, his tastes in fruits and wines, his handwriting, his very teeth and boots. He passed his life in a sort of trance, an ecstasy of self-absorption; he had fallen in love with his own conception of himself, like a metaphysical Narcissus. This idiosyncrasy was the means of defeating various conspiracies, in which Chalks, of course, was the prime mover, calculated to impose upon his credulity, and send him back to London loaded down with misinformation.

'His cheek, by Christopher!' cried Chalks. 'Live in the Quarter for a fortnight, keep his eyes and ears shut, talk perpetually of Davis Blake, and read nothing but his own works, and then go home and write a book about it. I'll quarter him!'

But Chalks counted without his man. That Monsieur Bullier, the founder of the Closerie des Lilas, was also Professor of Moral Philosophy in the Collège de France; that the word étudiante (for Blake had only a tourist's smattering of French) should literally be translated student, and that the young ladies who bore it as a name were indeed pursuing rigorous courses of study at the Sorbonne; that it was obligatory upon a freshman (nouveau) in the Quarter to shave his head and wear wooden shoes for the first month after his matriculation--from these and kindred superstitions Blake was saved by his grand talent for never paying attention.

In the meanwhile some of us had read his books: chromo-lithographs, struck in the primary colours; pasteboard complications of passion and adventure, with the conservative entanglement of threadbare marionettes--a hero, tall, with golden brown moustaches and blue eyes; a heroine, lissome, with 'sunny locks;' then a swarthy villain, for the most part a nobleman, and his Spanish-looking female accomplice, who had an uncomfortable habit of delivering her remarks 'from between clenched teeth,' and, generally, 'in a blood-chilling hiss'--the narrative set forth in a sustained fortissimo, and punctuated by the timely exits of the god from the machine. Never a felicity, never an impression. I fancy he had made his notes of human nature whilst observing the personages of a melodrama at a provincial theatre. He loved the obvious sentiment, the obvious and but approximate word.

But the climax of his infatuation was not disclosed till the night before he left us. Again we were in session at the Café des Souris, and the talk had turned upon metempsychosis. Blake, for a wonder, pricked up his ears and appeared to listen, at the same time watching his chance to take the floor. Half-a-dozen men had their say first, however; then he cut in.

'Metempsychosis is not a theory, it is a fact. I can testify to it from my personal experience. I know it. I can distinctly recall my

former life. I can tell you who I was, who my friends were, what I did, what I felt, everything, down to the very dishes I preferred for dinner.'

Chalks scanned Blake's features for an instant with an intentness that suggested a mingling of perplexity and malice; then, all at once, I saw a light flash in his eyes, which forthwith began to twinkle in a manner that struck me as ominous.

'In my early youth,' Blake continued, 'this memory of mine was, if I may so phrase it, piecemeal and occasional. Feeling that I was no ordinary man, conscious of strange forces struggling in me, I would obtain, as it were, glimpses, fleeting and unsatisfactory, into a former state. Then they would go, not for long intervals to return. As time elapsed, however, these glimpses, to call them so, became more frequent and lasting, the intervals of oblivion shorter; and at last, one day on Hampstead Heath, I identified myself in a sudden burst of insight. I was walking on the Heath, and thinking of my work--marvelling at a certain quality I had discerned in it, which, I was convinced, would assure it everlasting life: a quality that seemed not unfamiliar to me, and yet which I could associate with none of the writers whose names passed in review before my mind; not with Byron, or Shelley, or Keats, not with Wordsworth or Coleridge, Goethe or Dante, not even with Homer. I mean the quality which I call universal--universal in its authenticity, universal in its appeal. By-and-bye, I took out a little pocket mirror that I always carry, and looked into it, studying my face. One glance sufficed. There, suddenly, on Hampstead Heath, the whole thing flashed upon me. I saw, I understood; I realised who I was, I remembered everything.'

'Stop right there, Mr. Blake,' called out Chalks in stentorian tones. 'Don't you say another word. I'm going to hail you by your right name in half-a-minute. I guess I must have recognised you the very first time I clapped eyes on your distinguished physiognomy; only I couldn't just \_place\_ you, as we say over in America. But there was a \_je ne sais quoi\_ in the whole cut of your jib as familiar to me as rolls and coffee. I tried and tried to think when and where I'd had the pleasure before. But now that you speak of a former state of existence--why, I'm \_there\_! It was all I needed, just a little hint like that, to jog my memory. Talk about entertaining angels unawares! The beard, eh? And the yaller cloak? And ain't there a statue of you up Boulevard Haussmann way? Shakesy, old man, shake!'

And Chalks got hold of his victim's hand and wrung it fervently. 'I'm particularly glad to meet you this way,' he added, 'because I was Queen Elizabeth myself; and I can't begin to tell you how sort of out of it I felt, alone here with all this degenerate posterity.'

Blake coldly withdrew his hand, frowning loftily at Chalks. 'You should reserve your nonsense for more appropriate occasions,' he said. 'Though you speak in a spirit of foolish levity, you have builded

better than you knew. I am indeed Shakespeare re-incarnated. My books alone would prove it; they could have been dictated by no other mind. But--look at this.'

He produced from an interior pocket a case of red morocco and handed it to me. 'You,' he said, with a flattering emphasis upon the pronoun, 'you are a man who can treat a serious matter seriously. What do you think of that?'

The case contained a photograph, and the photograph represented the head and shoulders of Mr. Blake and a bust of Shakespeare, placed cheek by jowl. In the pointed beard and the wide-set eyes there were, perhaps, the rudiments of something remotely like a likeness.

'Isn't that conclusive?' he demanded. 'Doesn't that place the fact beyond the reach of question?'

'You've got more hair than you used to have,' said Chalks. 'I'm talking of the front hair--your forehead ain't as high as it was. But your back hair is all right enough.'

'You have put your finger on the one, the only, point of difference,' assented Blake,

On our way home he took my arm, and pitched his voice in the key of confidence. 'I am writing my autobiography, from my birth in Stratford down to the present day. It will be in two parts; the interim when people thought me dead, marking their separation. I was not dead; I slept a dreamless sleep. Presently I shall sleep again; as men say, die; then doubtless wake again. Life and death are but sleeping and waking on a larger scale. Our little life is rounded with a sleep. It is the swing of the pendulum, the revolution of the orb. Yes, I am writing my autobiography. So little is known of the private history of Shakespeare, conceive the boon it will be to mankind. I shall leave the manuscripts to my executors, for them to publish after I have lain down to my next long rest. Of special value will be the chapters telling how I wrote the plays, settling disputed readings, closing all controversy upon the sanity of Hamlet, and divulging the true personality of Mr. W.H.'

He came into my room for a little visit before going to bed. There, candle in hand, he gazed long and earnestly into my chimney-glass.

'Yes,' he sighed at last, 'it is solely in the quantity of my hair that the resemblance fails.'

I understood now why he trained it back and plastered it down over his scalp, as he did; at a rough glance, you might have got the impression that the crown of his head was bald. I suppose he is the only man in two hemispheres who finds the opposite condition a matter of regret.



## THE MERRIE JESTS OF KING LOUIS THE ELEVENTH

The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Droll Stories, Complete*, by Honore de Balzac

King Louis The Eleventh was a merry fellow, loving a good joke, and--the interests of his position as king, and those of the church on one side--he lived jovially, giving chase to soiled doves as often as to hares, and other royal game. Therefore, the sorry scribblers who have made him out a hypocrite, showed plainly that they knew him not, since he was a good friend, good at repartee, and a jollier fellow than any of them.

It was he who said when he was in a merry mood, that four things are excellent and opportune in life--to keep warm, to drink cool, to stand up hard, and to swallow soft. Certain persons have accused him of taking up with a dirty trollops; this is a notorious falsehood, since all his mistresses, of whom one was legitimised, came of good houses and had notable establishments. He did not go in for waste and extravagance, always put his hand upon the solid, and because certain devourers of the people found no crumbs at his table, they have all maligned him. But the real collector of facts know that the said king was a capital fellow in private life, and even very agreeable; and before cutting off the heads of his friends, or punishing them--for he did not spare them--it was necessary that they should have greatly offended him, and his vengeance was always justice; I have only seen in our friend Verville that this worthy sovereign ever made a mistake; but one does not make a habit, and even for this his boon companion Tristan was more to blame than he, the king. This is the circumstance related by the said Verville, and I suspect he was cracking a joke. I reproduce it because certain people are not familiar with the exquisite work of my perfect compatriot. I abridge it and only give the substance, the details being more ample, of which facts the savans are not ignorant.

Louis XI. had given the Abbey of Turpenay (mentioned in 'Imperia') to a gentleman who, enjoying the revenue, had called himself Monsieur de Turpenay. It happened that the king being at Plessis-les-Tours, the real abbot, who was a monk, came and presented himself before the king, and presented also a petition, remonstrating with him that, canonically and a monastically, he was entitled to the abbey and that the usurping gentleman wronged of his right, and therefore he called upon his majesty to have justice done to him. Nodding his peruke, the king promised to render him contented. This monk, importunate as are all hooded animals, came often at the end of the king's meals, who, bored with the holy water of the convent, called friend Tristan and said to him: "Old fellow, there is here a Turpenay who angers me, rid the world of him for me." Tristan, taking a frock for a monk, or a



monk for a frock, came to this gentleman, whom all the court called Monsieur de Turpenay, and having accosted him managed to lead him to one side, and taking him by the button-hole gave him to understand that the king desired he should die. He tried to resist, supplicating and supplicating to escape, but in no way could he obtain a hearing. He was delicately strangled between the head and shoulders, so that he expired; and, three hours afterwards, Tristan told the king that he was discharged. It happened five days afterwards, which is the space in which souls come back again, that the monk came into the room where the king was, and when he saw him he was much astonished. Tristan was present: the king called him, and whispered into his ear--

"You have not done that which I told you to."

"Saving your Grace I have done it. Turpenay is dead."

"Eh? I meant this monk."

"I understood the gentleman!"

"What, is it done then?"

"Yes, sire,"

"Very well then"--turning towards the monk--"come here, monk." The monk approached. The king said to him, "Kneel down!" The poor monk began to shiver in his shoes. But the king said to him, "Thank God that he has not willed that you should be killed as I had ordered. He who took your estates has been instead. God has done you justice. Go and pray God for me, and don't stir out of your convent."

This proves the good-heartedness of Louis XI. He might very well have hanged the monk, the cause of the error. As for the said gentleman, he died in the king's service.

In the early days of his sojourn at Plessis-les-Tours king Louis, not wishing to hold his drinking-bouts and give vent to his rakish propensities in his chateau, out of respect to her Majesty (a kingly delicacy which his successors have not possessed) became enamoured of a lady named Nicole Beaupertuys, who was, to tell the truth, wife of a citizen of the town. The husband he sent into Ponent, and put the said Nicole in a house near Chardonneret, in that part which is the Rue Quincangrogne, because it was a lonely place, far from other habitations. The husband and the wife were thus both in his service, and he had by La Beaupertuys a daughter, who died a nun. This Nicole had a tongue as sharp as a popinjay's, was of stately proportions, furnished with large beautiful cushions of nature, firm to the touch, white as the wings of an angel, and known for the rest to be fertile in peripatetic ways, which brought it to pass that never with her was the same thing encountered twice in love, so deeply had she studied the sweet solutions of the science, the manners of accommodating the

olives of Poissy, the expansions of the nerves, and hidden doctrines of the breviary, the which much delighted the king. She was as gay as a lark, always laughing and singing, and never made anyone miserable, which is the characteristic of women of this open and free nature, who have always an occupation--an equivocal one if you like. The king often went with the hail-fellows his friends to the lady's house, and in order not to be seen always went at night-time, and without his suite. But being always distrustful, and fearing some snare, he gave to Nicole all the most savage dogs he had in his kennels, beggars that would eat a man without saying "By your leave," the which royal dogs knew only Nicole and the king. When the Sire came Nicole let them loose in the garden, and the door of the house being sufficiently barred and closely shut, the king put the keys in his pocket, and in perfect security gave himself up, with his satellites, to every kind of pleasure, fearing no betrayal, jumping about at will, playing tricks, and getting up good games. Upon these occasions friend Tristan watched the neighbourhood, and anyone who had taken a walk on the Mall of Chardonneret would be rather quickly placed in a position in which it would have been easy to give the passers-by a benediction with his feet, unless he had the king's pass, since often would Louis send out in search of lasses for his friends, or people to entertain him with the amusements suggested by Nicole or the guests. People of Tours were there for these little amusements, to whom he gently recommended silence, so that no one knew of these pastimes until after his death. The farce of "Baisez mon cul" was, it is said, invented by the said Sire. I will relate it, although it is not the subject of this tale, because it shows the natural comicality and humour of this merry monarch. They were at Tours three well known misers: the first was Master Cornelius, who is sufficiently well known; the second was called Peccard, and sold the gilt-work, coloured papers, and jewels used in churches; the third was hight Marchandean, and was a very wealthy vine-grower. These two men of Touraine were the founders of good families, notwithstanding their sordidness. One evening that the king was with Beaupertuys, in a good humour, having drunk heartily, joked heartily, and offered early in the evening his prayer in Madame's oratory, he said to Le Daim his crony, to the Cardinal, La Balue, and to old Dunois, who were still soaking, "Let us have a good laugh! I think it will be a good joke to see misers before a bag of gold without being able to touch it. Hi, there!"

Hearing which, appeared one of his varlets.

"Go," said he, "seek my treasurer, and let him bring hither six thousand gold crowns--and at once! And you will go and seize the bodies of my friend Cornelius, of the jeweller of the Rue de Cygnes, and of old Marchandean, and bring them here, by order of the king."

Then he began to drink again, and to judiciously wrangle as to which was the better, a woman with a gamy odour or a woman who soaped herself well all over; a thin one or a stout one; and as the company comprised the flower of wisdom it was decided that the best was the

one a man had all to himself like a plate of warm mussels, at that precise moment when God sent him a good idea to communicate to her. The cardinal asked which was the most precious thing to a lady; the first or the last kiss? To which La Beaupertuys replied: "that it was the last, seeing that she knew then what she was losing, while at the first she did not know what she would gain." During these sayings, and others which have most unfortunately been lost, came the six thousand gold crowns, which were worth all three hundred thousand francs of to-day, so much do we go on decreasing in value every day. The king ordered the crowns to be arranged upon a table, and well lighted up, so that they shone like the eyes of the company which lit up involuntarily, and made them laugh in spite of themselves. They did not wait long for the three misers, whom the varlet led in, pale and panting, except Cornelius, who knew the king's strange freaks.

"Now then, my friends," said Louis to them, "have a good look at the crowns on the table."

And the three townsmen nibbled at them with their eyes. You may reckon that the diamond of La Beaupertuys sparkled less than their little minnow eyes.

"These are yours," added the king.

Thereupon they ceased to admire the crowns to look at each other; and the guests knew well that old knaves are more expert in grimaces than any others, because of their physiognomies becoming tolerably curious, like those of cats lapping up milk, or girls titillated with marriage.

"There," said the king, "all that shall be his who shall say three times to the two others, ' \_Baisez mon cul\_ ', thrusting his hand into the gold; but if he be not as serious as a fly who had violated his lady-love, if he smile while repeating the jest, he will pay ten crowns to Madame. Nevertheless he can essay three times."

"That will soon be earned," said Cornelius, who, being a Dutchman, had his lips as often compressed and serious as Madame's mouth was often open and laughing. Then he bravely put his hands on the crowns to see if they were good, and clutched them bravely, but as he looked at the others to say civilly to them, " \_Baisez mon cul\_ ", the two misers, distrustful of his Dutch gravity, replied, "Certainly, sir," as if he had sneezed. The which caused all the company to laugh, and even Cornelius himself. When the vine-grower went to take the crowns he felt such a commotion in his cheeks that his old scummer face let little laughs exude from its pores like smoke pouring out of a chimney, and he could say nothing. Then it was the turn of the jeweller, who was a little bit of a bantering fellow, and whose lips were as tightly squeezed as the neck of a hanged man. He seized a handful of the crowns, looked at the others, even the king, and said, with a jeering air, " \_Baisez mon cul\_ ."

"Is it dirty?" asked the vine-dresser.

"Look and see," replied the jeweller, gravely.

Thereupon the king began to tremble for these crowns, since the said Peccard began again, without laughing, and for the third time was about to utter the sacramental word, when La Beaupertuys made a sign of consent to his modest request, which caused him to lose his countenance, and his mouth broke up into dimples.

"How did you do it?" asked Dunois, "to keep a grave face before six thousand crowns?"

"Oh, my lord, I thought first of one of my cases which is tried tomorrow, and secondly, of my wife who is a sorry plague."

The desire to gain this good round sum made them try again, and the king amused himself for about an hour at the expression of these faces, the preparations, jokes, grimaces, and other monkey's paternosters that they performed; but they were bailing their boats with a sieve, and for men who preferred closing their fists to opening them it was a bitter sorrow to have to count out, each one, a hundred crown to Madame.

When they were gone, and Nicole said boldly to the king, "Sire will you let me try?"

"Holy Virgin!" replied Louis; "no! I can kiss you for less money."

That was said like a thrifty man, which indeed he always was.

One evening the fat Cardinal La Balue carried on gallantly with words and actions, a little farther than the canons of the Church permitted him, with this Beaupertuys, who luckily for herself, was a clever hussy, not to be asked with impunity how many holes there were in her mother's chemise.

"Look you here, Sir Cardinal!" said she; "the thing which the king likes is not to receive the holy oils."

Then came Oliver le Daim, whom she would not listen to either, and to whose nonsense she replied, that she would ask the king if he wished her to be shaved.

Now as the said shaver did not supplicate her to keep his proposals secret, she suspected that these little plots were ruses practised by the king, whose suspicions had perhaps been aroused by her friends. Now, for being able to revenge herself upon Louis, she at least determined to pay out the said lords, to make fools of them, and amuse the king with the tricks she would play upon them. One evening that they had come to supper, she had a lady of the city with her, who

wished to speak with the king. This lady was a lady of position, who wished asked the king pardon for her husband, the which, in consequence of this adventure, she obtained. Nicole Beaupertuys having led the king aside for a moment into an antechamber, told him to make their guests drink hard and eat to repletion; that he was to make merry and joke with them; but when the cloth was removed, he was to pick quarrels with them about trifles, dispute their words, and be sharp with them; and that she would then divert him by turning them inside out before him. But above all things, he was to be friendly to the said lady, and it was to appear as genuine, as if she enjoyed the perfume of his favour, because she had gallantly lent herself to this good joke.

"Well, gentlemen," said the king, re-entering the room, "let us fall to; we have had a good day's sport."

And the surgeon, the cardinal, a fat bishop, the captain of the Scotch Guard, a parliamentary envoy, and a judge loved of the king, followed the two ladies into the room where one rubs the rust off one's jaw bones. And there they lined the mold of their doublets. What is that? It is to pave the stomach, to practice the chemistry of nature, to register the various dishes, to regale your tripes, to dig your grave with your teeth, play with the sword of Cain, to inter sauces, to support a cuckold. But more philosophically it is to make ordure with one's teeth. Now, do you understand? How many words does it require to burst open the lid of your understanding?

The king did not fail to distill into his guests this splendid and first-class supper. He stuffed them with green peas, returning to the hotch-potch, praising the plums, commending the fish, saying to one, "Why do you not eat?" to another, "Drink to Madame"; to all of them, "Gentlemen, taste these lobsters; put this bottle to death! You do not know the flavour of this forcemeat. And these lampreys--ah! what do you say to them? And by the Lord! The finest barbel ever drawn from the Loire! Just stick your teeth into this pastry. This game is my own hunting; he who takes it not offends me." And again, "Drink, the king's eyes are the other way. Just give your opinion of these preserves, they are Madame's own. Have some of these grapes, they are my own growing. Have some medlars." And while inducing them to swell out their abdominal protuberances, the good monarch laughed with them, and they joked and disputed, and spat, and blew their noses, and kicked up just as though the king had not been with them. Then so much victuals had been taken on board, so many flagons drained and stews spoiled, that the faces of the guests were the colour of cardinals gowns, and their doublets appeared ready to burst, since they were crammed with meat like Troyes sausages from the top to the bottom of their paunches. Going into the saloon again, they broke into a profuse sweat, began to blow, and to curse their gluttony. The king sat quietly apart; each of them was the more willing to be silent because all their forces were required for the intestinal digestion of the huge platefuls confined in their stomachs, which began to wobble and

rumble violently. One said to himself, "I was stupid to eat of that sauce." Another scolded himself for having indulged in a plate of eels cooked with capers. Another thought to himself, "Oh! oh! The forcemeat is serving me out." The cardinal, who was the biggest bellied man of the lot, snorted through his nostrils like a frightened horse. It was he who was first compelled to give vent to a loud sounding belch, and then he soon wished himself in Germany, where this is a form of salutation, for the king hearing this gastric language looked at the cardinal with knitted brows.

"What does this mean?" said he, "am I a simple clerk?"

This was heard with terror, because usually the king made much of a good belch well off the stomach. The other guests determined to get rid in another way of the vapours which were dodging about in their pancreatic retorts; and at first they endeavoured to hold them for a little while in the pleats of their mesenteries. It was then that some of them puffed and swelled like tax-gatherers. Beaupertuys took the good king aside and said to him--

"Know now that I have had made by the Church jeweller Peccard, two large dolls, exactly resembling this lady and myself. Now when hard-pressed by the drugs which I have put in their goblets, they desire to mount the throne to which we are now about to pretend to go, they will always find the place taken; by this means you will enjoy their writhings."

Thus having said, La Beaupertuys disappeared with the lady to go and turn the wheel, after the custom of women, and of which I will tell you the origin in another place. And after an honest lapse of water, Beaupertuys came back alone, leaving it to be believed that she had left the lady at the little laboratory of natural alchemy. Thereupon the king, singling out the cardinal, made him get up, and talked with him seriously of his affairs, holding him by the tassel of his amice. To all that the king said, La Balue replied, "Yes, sir," to be delivered from this favour, and slip out of the room, since the water was in his cellars, and he was about to lose the key of his back-door. All the guests were in a state of not knowing how to arrest the progress of the fecal matter to which nature has given, even more than to water, the property of finding a certain level. Their substances modified themselves and glided working downward, like those insects who demand to be let out of their cocoons, raging, tormenting, and ungrateful to the higher powers; for nothing is so ignorant, so insolent as those cursed objects, and they are importunate like all things detained to whom one owes liberty. So they slipped at every turn like eels out of a net, and each one had need of great efforts and science not to disgrace himself before the king. Louis took great pleasure in interrogating his guests, and was much amused with the vicissitudes of their physiognomies, on which were reflected the dirty grimaces of their writhings. The counsellor of justice said to Oliver, "I would give my office to be behind a hedge for half a dozen

seconds."

"Oh, there is no enjoyment to equal a good stool; and now I am no longer astonished at sempiternal droppings of a fly," replied the surgeon.

The cardinal believing that the lady had obtained her receipt from the bank of deposit, left the tassels of his girdle in the king's hand, making a start as if he had forgotten to say his prayers, and made his way towards the door.

"What is the matter with you, Monsieur le Cardinal?" said the king.

"By my halidame, what is the matter with me? It appears that all your affairs are very extensive, sire!"

The cardinal had slipped out, leaving the others astonished at his cunning. He proceeded gloriously towards the lower room, loosening a little the strings of his purse; but when he opened the blessed little door he found the lady at her functions upon the throne, like a pope about to be consecrated. Then restraining his impatience, he descended the stairs to go into the garden. However, on the last steps the barking of the dogs put him in great fear of being bitten in one of his precious hemispheres; and not knowing where to deliver himself of his chemical produce he came back into the room, shivering like a man who has been in the open air! The others seeing the cardinal return, imagined that he had emptied his natural reservoirs, unburdened his ecclesiastical bowels, and believed him happy. Then the surgeon rose quickly, as if to take note of the tapestries and count the rafters, but gained the door before anyone else, and relaxing his sphincter in advance, he hummed a tune on his way to the retreat; arrived there he was compelled, like La Balue, to murmur words of excuse to this student of perpetual motion, shutting the door with as promptitude as he opened it; and he came back burdened with an accumulation which seriously impeded his private channels. And in the same way went to guests one after the other, without being able to unburden themselves of their sauces, as soon again found themselves all in the presence of Louis the Eleventh, as much distressed as before, looking at each other slyly, understanding each other better with their tails than they ever understood with their mouths, for there is never any equivoque in the transactions of the parts of nature, and everything therein is rational and of easy comprehension, seeing that it is a science which we learn at our birth.

"I believe," said the cardinal to the surgeon, "that lady will go on until to-morrow. What was La Beaupertuys about to ask such a case of diarrhoea here?"

"She's been an hour working at what I could get done in a minute. May the fever seize her" cried Oliver le Daim.

All the courtiers seized with colic were walking up and down to make their importunate matters patient, when the said lady reappeared in the room. You can believe they found her beautiful and graceful, and would willingly have kissed her, there where they so longed to go; and never did they salute the day with more favour than this lady, the liberator of the poor unfortunate bodies. La Balue rose; the others, from honour, esteem, and reverence of the church, gave way to the clergy, and, biding their time, they continued to make grimaces, at which the king laughed to himself with Nicole, who aided him to stop the respiration of these loose-bowelled gentlemen. The good Scotch captain, who more than all the others had eaten of a dish in which the cook had put an aperient powder, became the victim of misplaced confidence. He went ashamed into a corner, hoping that before the king, his mishap might escape detection. At this moment the cardinal returned horribly upset, because he had found La Beaupertuys on the episcopal seat. Now, in his torments, not knowing if she were in the room, he came back and gave vent to a diabolical "Oh!" on beholding her near his master.

"What do you mean?" exclaimed the king, looking at the priest in a way to give him the fever.

"Sire," said La Balue, insolently, "the affairs of purgatory are in my ministry, and I am bound to inform you that there is sorcery going on in this house."

"Ah! little priest, you wish to make game of me!" said the king.

At these words the company were in a terrible state.

"So you treat me with disrespect?" said the king, which made them turn pale. "Ho, there! Tristan, my friend!" cried Louis XI. from the window, which he threw up suddenly, "come up here!"

The grand provost of the hotel was not long before he appeared; and as these gentlemen were all nobodies, raised to their present position by the favour of the king, Louis, in a moment of anger, could crush them at will; so that with the exception of the cardinal who relied upon his cassock, Tristan found them all rigid and aghast.

"Conduct these gentleman to the Pretorium, on the Mall, my friend, they have disgraced themselves through over-eating."

"Am I not good at jokes?" said Nicole to him.

"The farce is good, but it is fetid," replied he, laughing.

This royal answer showed the courtiers that this time the king did not intend to play with their heads, for which they thanked heaven. The monarch was partial to these dirty tricks. He was not at all a bad fellow, as the guests remarked while relieving themselves against the



side of the Mall with Tristan, who, like a good Frenchman, kept them company, and escorted them to their homes. This is why since that time the citizens of Tours had never failed to defile the Mall of Chardonneret, because the gentlemen of the court had been there.

I will not leave this great king without committing to writing this good joke which he played upon La Godegrand, who was an old maid, much disgusted that she had not, during the forty years she had lived, been able to find a lid to her saucepan, enraged, in her yellow skin, that she still was as virgin as a mule. This old maid had her apartments on the other side of the house which belonged to La Beaupertuys, at the corner of the Rue de Hierusalem, in such a position that, standing on the balcony joining the wall, it was easy to see what she was doing, and hear what she was saying in the lower room where she lived; and often the king derived much amusement from the antics of the old girl, who did not know that she was so much within the range of his majesty's culverin. Now one market day it happened that the king had caused to be hanged a young citizen of Tours, who had violated a noble lady of a certain age, believing that she was a young maiden. There would have been no harm in this, and it would have been a thing greatly to the credit of the said lady to have been taken for a virgin; but on finding out his mistake, he had abominably insulted her, and suspecting her of trickery, had taken it into his head to rob her of a splendid silver goblet, in payment of the present he had just made her. This young man had long hair, and was so handsome that the whole town wished to see him hanged, both from regret and out of curiosity. You may be sure that at this hanging there were more caps than hats. Indeed, the said young man swung very well; and after the fashion and custom of persons hanged, he died gallantly with his lance couched, which fact made a great noise in the town. Many ladies said on this subject that it was a murder not to have preserved so fine a fellow from the scaffold.

"Suppose we were to put this handsome corpse in the bed of La Godegrand," said La Beaupertuys to the king.

"We should terrify her," replied Louis.

"Not at all, sire. Be sure that she will welcome even a dead man, so madly does she long for a living one. Yesterday I saw her making love to a young man's cap placed on the top of a chair, and you would have laughed heartily at her words and gestures."

Now while this forty-year-old virgin was at vespers, the king sent to have this young townsman, who had just finished the last scene of his tragic farce, taken down, and having dressed him in a white shirt, two officers got over the walls of La Godegrand's garden, and put the corpse into her bed, on the side nearest the street. Having done this they went away, and the king remained in the room with the balcony to it, playing with Beaupertuys, and awaiting an hour at which the old maid should go to bed. La Godegrand soon came back with a hop, skip,

and jump, as the Tourainians say, from the church of St Martin, from which she was not far, since the Rue de Hierusalem touches the walls of the cloister. She entered her house, laid down her prayer-book, chaplet, and rosary, and other ammunition which these old girls carry, then poked the fire, and blew it, warmed herself at it, settled herself in her chair, and played with her cat for want of something better; then she went to the larder, supping and sighing, and sighing and supping, eating alone, with her eyes cast down upon the carpet; and after having drunk, behaved in a manner forbidden in court society.

"Ah!" the corpse said to her, "'\_ God bless you!'"

At this joke of luck of La Beaupertuys, both laughed heartily in their sleeves. And with great attention this very Christian king watched the undressing of the old maid, who admired herself while removing her things--pulling out a hair, or scratching a pimple which had maliciously come upon her nose; picking her teeth, and doing a thousand little things which, alas! all ladies, virgins or not, are obliged to do, much to their annoyance; but without these little faults of nature, they would be too proud, and one would not be able to enjoy their society. Having achieved her aquatic and musical discourse, the old maid got in between the sheets, and yelled forth a fine, great, ample, and curious cry, when she saw, when she smelt the fresh vigour of this hanged man and the sweet perfume of his manly youth; then sprang away from him out of coquetry. But as she did not know he was really dead, she came back again, believing he was mocking her, and counterfeiting death.

"Go away, you bad young man!" said she.

But you can imagine that she proffered this requests in a most humble and gracious tone of voice. Then seeing that he did not move, she examined him more closely, and was much astonished at this so fine human nature when she recognised the young fellow, upon whom the fancy took her to perform some purely scientific experiments in the interests of hanged persons.

"What is she doing?" said La Beaupertuys to the king.

"She is trying to reanimate him. It is a work of Christian humanity."

And the old girl rubbed and warmed this fine young man, supplicating holy Mary the Egyptian to aid her to renew the life of this husband who had fallen so amorously from heaven, when, suddenly looking at the dead body she was so charitably rubbing, she thought she saw a slight movement in the eyes; then she put her hand upon the man's heart, and felt it beat feebly. At length, from the warmth of the bed and of affection, and by the temperature of old maids, which is by far more burning than the warm blasts of African deserts, she had the delight of bringing to life that fine handsome young fellow who by lucky

chance had been very badly hanged.

"See how my executioners serve me!" said Louis, laughing.

"Ah!" said La Beaupertuys, "you will not have him hanged again? he is too handsome."

"The decree does not say that he shall be hanged twice, but he shall marry the old woman."

Indeed, the good lady went in a great hurry to seek a master leech, a good bleeder, who lived in the Abbey, and brought him back directly. He immediately took his lancet, and bled the young man. And as no blood came out: "Ah!" said he, "it is too late, the transshipment of blood in the lungs has taken place."

But suddenly this good young blood oozed out a little, and then came out in abundance, and the hempen apoplexy, which had only just begun, was arrested in its course. The young man moved and came more to life; then he fell, from natural causes, into a state of great weakness and profound sadness, prostration of flesh and general flabbiness. Now the old maid, who was all eyes, and followed the great and notable changes which were taking place in the person of this badly hanged man, pulled the surgeon by the sleeve, and pointing out to him, by a curious glance of the eye, the piteous cause, said to him--

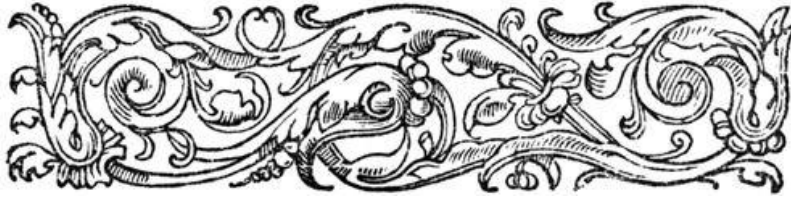
"Will he for the future be always like that?"

"Often," replied the veracious surgeon.

"Oh! he was much nicer hanged!"

At this speech the king burst out laughing. Seeing him at the window, the woman and the surgeon were much frightened, for this laugh seemed to them a second sentence of death for their poor victim. But the king kept his word, and married them. And in order to do justice he gave the husband the name of the Sieur de Mortsau in the place of the one he had lost upon the scaffold. As La Godegrand had a very big basket of crowns, they founded a good family in Touraine, which still exists and is much respected, since M. de Mortsau faithfully served Louis the Eleventh on different occasions. Only he never liked to come across gibbets or old women, and never again made amorous assignations in the night.

This teaches us to thoroughly verify and recognise women, and not to deceive ourselves in the local difference which exists between the old and the young, for if we are not hanged for our errors of love, there are always great risks to run.



## EUPOMPUS GAVE SPLENDOUR TO ART BY NUMBERS

The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Limbo*, by Aldous Huxley

"I HAVE made a discovery," said Emberlin as I entered his room.

"What about?" I asked.

"A discovery," he replied, "about \_Discoveries\_." He radiated an unconcealed satisfaction; the conversation had evidently gone exactly as he had intended it to go. He had made his phrase, and, repeating it lovingly--"A discovery about \_Discoveries\_"--he smiled benignly at me, enjoying my look of mystification--an expression which, I confess, I had purposely exaggerated in order to give him pleasure. For Emberlin, in many ways so childish, took an especial delight in puzzling and nonplussing his acquaintances; and these small triumphs, these little "scores" off people afforded him some of his keenest pleasures. I always indulged his weakness when I could, for it was worth while being on Emberlin's good books. To be allowed to listen to his post-prandial conversation was a privilege indeed. Not only was he himself a consummately good talker, but he had also the power of stimulating others to talk well. He was like some subtle wine, intoxicating just to the Meredithian level of tipsiness. In his company you would find yourself lifted to the sphere of nimble and mercurial conceptions; you would suddenly realize that some miracle had occurred, that you were living no longer in a dull world of jumbled things but somewhere above the hotch-potch in a glassily perfect universe of ideas, where all was informed, consistent, symmetrical. And it was Emberlin who, godlike, had the power of creating this new and real world. He built it out of words, this crystal Eden, where no belly-going snake, devourer of quotidian dirt, might ever enter and disturb its harmonies. Since I first knew Emberlin I have come to have a greatly enhanced respect for magic and all the formulæ of its liturgy. If by words Emberlin can create a new world for me, can make my spirit slough off completely the domination of the old, why should not he or I or anyone, having found the suitable phrases, exert by means of them an influence more vulgarly miraculous upon the world of mere things? Indeed, when I compare Emberlin and the common or garden black magician of commerce, it seems to me that Emberlin is the greater thaumaturge. But let that pass; I am straying from my purpose, which was to give some description of the man who so confidentially whispered to me that he had made a discovery about \_Discoveries\_.

In the best sense of the word, then, Emberlin was academic. For us who knew him his rooms were an oasis of aloofness planted secretly in the heart of the desert of London. He exhaled an atmosphere that combined the fantastic speculativeness of the undergraduate with the more mellowed oddity of incredibly wise and antique dons. He was immensely erudite, but in a wholly unencyclopaedic way--a mine of irrelevant information, as his enemies said of him. He wrote a certain amount, but, like Mallarmé, avoided publication, deeming it akin to "the offence of exhibitionism." Once, however, in the folly of youth, some dozen years ago, he had published a volume of verses. He spent a good deal of time now in assiduously collecting copies of his book and burning them. There can be but very few left in the world now. My friend Cope had the fortune to pick one up the other day--a little blue book, which he showed me very secretly. I am at a loss to understand why Emberlin wishes to stamp out all trace of it. There is nothing to be ashamed of in the book; some of the verses, indeed, are, in their young ecstatic fashion, good. But they are certainly conceived in a style that is unlike that of his present poems. Perhaps it is that which makes him so implacable against them. What he writes now for very private manuscript circulation is curious stuff. I confess I prefer the earlier work; I do not like the stony, hard-edged quality of this sort of thing--the only one I can remember of his later productions. It is a sonnet on a porcelain figure of a woman, dug up at Cnossus:

"Her eyes of bright unwinking glaze  
All imperturbable do not  
Even make pretences to regard  
The jutting absence of her stays  
Where many a Syrian gallipot  
Excites desire with spilth of nard.  
The bistred rims above the fard  
Of cheeks as red as bergamot  
Attest that no shamefaced delays  
Will clog fulfilment nor retard  
Full payment of the Cyprian's praise  
Down to the last remorseful jot.  
Hail priestess of we know not what  
Strange cult of Mycenean days!"

Regrettably, I cannot remember any of Emberlin's French poems. His peculiar muse expresses herself better, I think, in that language than in her native tongue.

Such is Emberlin; such, I should rather say, was he, for, as I propose to show, he is not now the man that he was when he whispered so confidentially to me, as I entered the room, that he had made a discovery about Discoveries.

I waited patiently till he had finished his little game of mystification and, when the moment seemed ripe, I asked him to explain

himself. Emberlin was ready to open out.

"Well," he began, "these are the facts--a tedious introduction, I fear, but necessary. Years ago, when I was first reading Ben Jonson's *Discoveries*, that queer jotting of his, 'Eupompus gave splendour to Art by Numbers,' tickled my curiosity. You yourself must have been struck by the phrase, everybody must have noticed it; and everybody must have noticed too that no commentator has a word to say on the subject. That is the way of commentators--the obvious points fulsomely explained and discussed, the hard passages, about which one might want to know something passed over in the silence of sheer ignorance. 'Eupompus gave splendour to Art by Numbers'--the absurd phrase stuck in my head. At one time it positively haunted me. I used to chant it in my bath, set to music as an anthem. It went like this, so far as I remember"--and he burst into song: "'Eupompus, Eu-u-pompus gave sple-e-e-endour . . .'" and so on, through all the repetitions, the dragged-out rises and falls of a parodied anthem.

"I sing you this," he said when he had finished, "just to show you what a hold that dreadful sentence took upon my mind. For eight years, off and on, its senselessness has besieged me. I have looked up Eupompus in all the obvious books of reference, of course. He is there all right--Alexandrian artist, eternized by some wretched little author in some even wretcheder little anecdote, which at the moment I entirely forget; it had nothing, at any rate, to do with the embellishment of art by numbers. Long ago I gave up the search as hopeless; Eupompus remained for me a shadowy figure of mystery, author of some nameless outrage, bestower of some forgotten benefit upon the art that he practised. His history seemed wrapt in an impenetrable darkness. And then yesterday I discovered all about him and his art and his numbers. A chance discovery, than which few things have given me a greater pleasure.

"I happened upon it, as I say, yesterday when I was glancing through a volume of Zuylerius. Not, of course, the Zuylerius one knows," he added quickly, "otherwise one would have had the heart out of Eupompus' secret years ago."

"Of course," I repeated, "not the familiar Zuylerius."

"Exactly," said Emberlin, taking seriously my flippancy, "not the familiar John Zuylerius, Junior, but the elder Henricus Zuylerius, a much less--though perhaps undeservedly so--renowned figure than his son. But this is not the time to discuss their respective merits. At any rate, I discovered in a volume of critical dialogues by the elder Zuylerius, the reference, to which, without doubt, Jonson was referring in his note. (It was of course a mere jotting, never meant to be printed, but which Jonson's literary executors pitched into the book with all the rest of the available posthumous materials.) 'Eupompus gave splendour to Art by Numbers'--Zuylerius gives a very circumstantial account of the process. He must, I suppose, have found

the sources for it in some writer now lost to us."

Emberlin paused a moment to muse. The loss of the work of any ancient writer gave him the keenest sorrow. I rather believe he had written a version of the unrecovered books of Petronius. Some day I hope I shall be permitted to see what conception Emberlin has of the *Satyricon* as a whole. He would, I am sure, do Petronius justice--almost too much, perhaps.

"What was the story of Eupompus?" I asked. "I am all curiosity to know."

Emberlin heaved a sigh and went on.

"Zuylerius' narrative," he said, "is very bald, but on the whole lucid; and I think it gives one the main points of the story. I will give it you in my own words; that is preferable to reading his Dutch Latin. Eupompus, then, was one of the most fashionable portrait-painters of Alexandria. His clientele was large, his business immensely profitable. For a half-length in oils the great courtesans would pay him a month's earnings. He would paint likenesses of the merchant princes in exchange for the costliest of their outlandish treasures. Coal-black potentates would come a thousand miles out of Ethiopia to have a miniature limned on some specially choice panel of ivory; and for payment there would be camel-loads of gold and spices. Fame, riches, and honour came to him while he was yet young; an unparalleled career seemed to lie before him. And then, quite suddenly, he gave it all up--refused to paint another portrait. The doors of his studio were closed. It was in vain that clients, however rich, however distinguished, demanded admission; the slaves had their order; Eupompus would see no one but his own intimates."

Emberlin made a pause in his narrative.

"What was Eupompus doing?" I asked.

"He was, of course," said Emberlin, "occupied in giving splendour to Art by Numbers. And this, as far as I can gather from Zuylerius, is how it all happened. He just suddenly fell in love with numbers--head over ears, amorous of pure counting. Number seemed to him to be the sole reality, the only thing about which the mind of man could be certain. To count was the one thing worth doing, because it was the one thing you could be sure of doing right. Thus, art, that it may have any value at all, must ally itself with reality--must, that is, possess a numerical foundation. He carried the idea into practice by painting the first picture in his new style. It was a gigantic canvas, covering several hundred square feet--I have no doubt that Eupompus could have told you the exact area to an inch--and upon it was represented an illimitable ocean covered, as far as the eye could reach in every direction, with a multitude of black swans. There were thirty-three thousand of these black swans, each, even though it might

be but a speck on the horizon, distinctly limned. In the middle of the ocean was an island, upon which stood a more or less human figure having three eyes, three arms and legs, three breasts and three navels. In the leaden sky three suns were dimly expiring. There was nothing more in the picture; Zuylerius describes it exactly. Eupompus spent nine months of hard work in painting it. The privileged few who were allowed to see it pronounced it, finished, a masterpiece. They gathered round Eupompus in a little school, calling themselves the Philarithmics. They would sit for hours in front of his great work, contemplating the swans and counting them; according to the Philarithmics, to count and to contemplate were the same thing.

"Eupompus' next picture, representing an orchard of identical trees set in quincunxes, was regarded with less favour by the connoisseurs. His studies of crowds were, however, more highly esteemed; in these were portrayed masses of people arranged in groups that exactly imitated the number and position of the stars making up various of the more famous constellations. And then there was his famous picture of the amphitheatre, which created a furore among the Philarithmics. Zuylerius again gives us a detailed description. Tier upon tier of seats are seen, all occupied by strange Cyclopean figures. Each tier accommodates more people than the tier below, and the number rises in a complicated but regular progression. All the figures seated in the amphitheatre possess but a single eye, enormous and luminous, planted in the middle of the forehead: and all these thousands of single eyes are fixed, in a terrible and menacing scrutiny, upon a dwarf-like creature cowering pitiably in the arena. . . . He alone of the multitude possesses two eyes.

"I would give anything to see that picture," Emberlin added, after a pause. "The colouring, you know; Zuylerius gives no hint, but I feel somehow certain that the dominant tone must have been a fierce brick-red--a red granite amphitheatre filled with a red-robed assembly, sharply defined against an implacable blue sky."

"Their eyes would be green," I suggested.

Emberlin closed his eyes to visualize the scene and then nodded a slow and rather dubious assent.

"Up to this point," Emberlin resumed at length, "Zuylerius' account is very clear. But his descriptions of the later philarithmic art become extremely obscure; I doubt whether he understood in the least what it was all about. I will give you such meaning as I manage to extract from his chaos. Eupompus seems to have grown tired of painting merely numbers of objects. He wanted now to represent Number itself. And then he conceived the plan of rendering visible the fundamental ideas of life through the medium of those purely numerical terms into which, according to him, they must ultimately resolve themselves. Zuylerius speaks vaguely of a picture of Eros, which seems to have consisted of a series of interlacing planes. Eupompus' fancy seems next to have



been taken by various of the Socratic dialogues upon the nature of general ideas, and he made a series of illustrations for them in the same arithmo-geometric style. Finally there is Zuylerius' wild description of the last picture that Eupompus ever painted. I can make very little of it. The subject of the work, at least, is clearly stated; it was a representation of Pure Number, or God and the Universe, or whatever you like to call that pleasingly inane conception of totality. It was a picture of the cosmos seen, I take it, through a rather Neoplatonic \_camera obscura--\_very clear and in small. Zuylerius suggests a design of planes radiating out from a single point of light. I dare say something of the kind came in. Actually, I have no doubt, the work was a very adequate rendering in visible form of the conception of the one and the many, with all the intermediate stages of enlightenment between matter and the \_Fons Deitatis\_. However, it's no use speculating what the picture may have been going to look like. Poor old Eupompus went mad before he had completely finished it and, after he had dispatched two of the admiring Philarithmics with a hammer, he flung himself out of the window and broke his neck. That was the end of him, and that was how he gave splendour, regrettably transient, to Art by Numbers."

Emberlin stopped. We brooded over our pipes in silence; poor old Eupompus!

\* \* \* \* \*

That was four months ago, and to-day Emberlin is a confirmed and apparently irreclaimable Philarithmic, a quite whole-hearted Eupompian.

It was always Emberlin's way to take up the ideas that he finds in books and to put them into practice. He was once, for example, a working alchemist, and attained to considerable proficiency in the Great Art. He studied mnemonics under Bruno and Raymond Lully, and constructed for himself a model of the latter's syllogizing machine, in hopes of gaining that universal knowledge which the Enlightened Doctor guaranteed to its user. This time it is Eupompianism, and the thing has taken hold of him. I have held up to him all the hideous warnings that I can find in history. But it is no use.

There is the pitiable spectacle of Dr. Johnson under the tyranny of an Eupompian ritual, counting the posts and the paving-stones of Fleet Street. He himself knew best how nearly a madman he was.

And then I count as Eupompians all gamblers, all calculating boys, all interpreters of the prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse; then too the Elberfeld horses, most complete of all Eupompians.

And here was Emberlin joining himself to this sect, degrading himself to the level of counting beasts and irrational children and men, more or less insane. Dr. Johnson was at least born with a strain of the

Eupompian aberration in him; Emberlin is busily and consciously acquiring it. My expostulations, the expostulations of all his friends, are as yet unavailing. It is in vain that I tell Emberlin that counting is the easiest thing in the world to do, that when I am utterly exhausted, my brain, for lack of ability to perform any other work, just counts and reckons, like a machine, like an Elberfeld horse. It all falls on deaf ears; Emberlin merely smiles and shows me some new numerical joke that he has discovered. Emberlin can never enter a tiled bathroom now without counting how many courses of tiles there are from floor to ceiling. He regards it as an interesting fact that there are twenty-six rows of tiles in his bathroom and thirty-two in mine, while all the public lavatories in Holborn have the same number. He knows now how many paces it is from any one point in London to any other. I have given up going for walks with him. I am always made so distressingly conscious by his preoccupied look, that he is counting his steps.

His evenings, too, have become profoundly melancholy; the conversation, however well it may begin, always comes round to the same nauseating subject. We can never escape numbers; Eupompus haunts us. It is not as if we were mathematicians and could discuss problems of any interest or value. No, none of us are mathematicians, least of all Emberlin. Emberlin likes talking about such points as the numerical significance of the Trinity, the immense importance of its being three in one, not forgetting the even greater importance of its being one in three. He likes giving us statistics about the speed of light or the rate of growth in fingernails. He loves to speculate on the nature of odd and even numbers. And he seems to be unconscious how much he has changed for the worse. He is happy in an exclusively absorbing interest. It is as though some mental leprosy had fallen upon his intelligence.

In another year or so, I tell Emberlin, he may almost be able to compete with the calculating horses on their own ground. He will have lost all traces of his reason, but he will be able to extract cube roots in his head. It occurs to me that the reason why Eupompus killed himself was not that he was mad; on the contrary, it was because he was, temporarily, sane. He had been mad for years, and then suddenly the idiot's self-complacency was lit up by a flash of sanity. By its momentary light he saw into what gulfs of imbecility he had plunged. He saw and understood, and the full horror, the lamentable absurdity of the situation made him desperate. He vindicated Eupompus against Eupompianism, humanity against the Philarithmics. It gives me the greatest pleasure to think that he disposed of two of that hideous crew before he died himself.



## THE HIGH COST OF CONSCIENCE. By Beatrice Ravenel

Project Gutenberg's *O Henry Memorial Award Prize Stories of 1919*, by Various

"Any woman who can accept money from a gentleman who is in no way related to her--" Miss Fowler delivered judgment.

"My dear Aunt Maria, you mean a gentleman's disembodied spirit," Hugh's light, pleasant tones intervened.

"A legacy, Maria, is not quite the same thing. Mr. Winthrop Fowler's perfect intonation carried its usual implication that the subject was closed.

"--- is what I call an adventuress," Miss Fowler summed up. She had a way of ignoring objections, of reappearing beyond them like a submarine with the ultimate and detonating answer. "And now she wants to reopen the matter when the whole thing's over and done with. After three years. Extraordinary taste." She hitched her black-velvet Voltaire arm-chair a little away from the fire and spread a vast knitting-bag of Chinese brocade over her knees. "I suppose she isn't satisfied; she wants more."

"Naturally. I cannot imagine what other reason she could have for insisting on a personal interview," her brother agreed, dryly. He retired into the \_Transcript\_ as a Trappist withdraws into his vows. A chastened client of Mr. Fowler's once observed that a half-hour's encounter with him resulted in a rueful of asphyxiated topics.

Miss Maria, however, preferred disemboweling hers, "I shouldn't have consented," she snapped. "Hugh, if you would be so good as to sit down. You are obstructing the light. And the curtain-cord. If you could refrain from twisting it for a few moments."

Hugh let his long, high-shouldered figure lapse into the window-seat. "And besides, we're all dying to know what she looks like," he suggested.

"Speak for yourself, please," said Miss Fowler, with the vivacity of the lady who protests too much.

"I do, I do! Good Lord! I'm just as bad as the rest of you. All my life I've been consumed to know what Uncle Hugh could have seen in a perfectly obscure little person to make him do what he did. There must

have been something." His eyes travelled to a sketch in pencil of a man's head which hung in the shadow of the chimney-piece, a sketch whose uncanny suggestion might have come from the quality of the sitter or merely from a smudging of the medium. "Everything he did always seemed to me perfectly natural," he went on, as though conscious of new discovery. "Even those years when he was knocking about the world, hiding his address. Even when he had that fancy that people were persecuting him. Most people did worry him horribly."

A glance flashed between the two middle-aged listeners. It was a peculiar glance, full of a half-denied portent. Then Miss Fowler's fingers, true to their traditions, loosened their grip on her needles and casually smoothed out her work.

"I have asked you not to speak of that," she mentioned, quietly.

"I know. But of course there was no doubt at all that he was ~~sa~~ was entirely recovered before his death. Don't you think so, sir?"

His uncle laid down the paper and fixed the young man with the gray, unsheathed keenness that had sent so many witnesses grovelling to the naked truth. "No doubt whatever. I always held, and so did both the physicians, that his lack of balance was a temporary and sporadic thing, brought on by overwork--and certain unhappy conditions of his life. There has never been any such taint in our branch of the family."

"No-o, so they say," Hugh agreed. "One of our forebears did see ghosts, but that was rather the fashion. And his father, that old Johnnie over the fireplace--you take after him, Aunt Maria--he was the prize witch-smeller of his generation, and he condemned all the young and pretty ones. That hardly seems well-balanced."

"Collaterals on the distaff side," Mr. Fowler put in hastily. "If you would read Mendel--"

"Mendel? I have read about him." He raised the forefinger of his right hand. "Very suggestive. If your father was a black rabbit"--he raised the forefinger of his left--"and your mother was a white rabbit, then your male children would be"--he raised all the other fingers and paused as though taken aback by the size of the family--"would be blue guinea-pigs, with a tendency to club-foot and astigmatism, but your female children might only be rather clumsy tangoists with a weakness for cutting their poor relations. That's all I remember, but I do know that because I studied the charts."

"Very amusing," said Mr. Fowler, indulgently.

Hugh flushed.

"I am sure it can't be that way." Miss Maria flapped her knitting over. "But everything has changed since my day, and not for the better. The

curtain-cord."

"Beg pardon," muttered Hugh. His mind went on churning nonsense. "There are two days it is useless to flee from--the day of your death and the day when your family doesn't care for your jokes."

"For a joke is an intellectual thing,  
And a \_mot\_ is the sword of an angel king."

"Good old Blake. Why do the best people always see jokes? Why does a really good one make a whole frozen crowd feel jolly and united all of a sudden?" He pondered on the beneficence of the comic spirit. Hugh was a born Deist. It gave him no trouble at all to believe that since the paintings of Velasquez and the great outdoors which he had seen, were beautiful, so much the more beautiful must be that God whom he had not seen. It seemed reasonable. As for the horrors like Uncle Hugh's affair--well, they must be put in for chiaroscuro. A thing couldn't be all white without being blank. The thought of the shadows, however, always made him profoundly uncomfortable, and his instinct right-about-faced to the lighter surface of life. "Anyhow," he broke silence, "the daughter of Heth must be game. Three to one, and on our native heath."

He looked appraisingly about the room, pausing at the stiff, distinguished, grey-haired couple, one on either side of the fire. The effect was of a highly finished genre picture: the rich wainscot between low book-shelves, the brooding portraits, the black-blue rug bordered by a veiled Oriental motive, the black-velvet cushions that brought out the watery reflections of old Sheraton as even the ancient horsehair had not done; the silver candlesticks, the miniatures, and on the mantel those two royal flower-pots whose precarious existence was to his aunt a very fearful joy. Even the tortoise-shell cat, sprawled between the two figures like a tiny tiger-skin, was in the picture. It was a room that gently put you into your place. Hugh recalled with a faint grin certain meetings here of philanthropic ladies whose paths had seldom turned into the interiors of older Beacon Street. The state of life to which it had pleased their Maker to call them, he reflected, would express itself preferably in gilding and vast pale-tinted upholstery and pink bibelots--oh, quite a lot of pink. This place had worried them into a condition of disconcerted awe.

He tried to fancy what it was going to do to the unbidden, resented guest. A queer protest against its enmity, an impulse to give her a square deal, surged up in him from nowhere. After all, whatever else she might be, she was Uncle Hugh's girl. Like all the world, Hugh loved the dispossessed lover. He knew what it felt like. One does not reach the mature age of twenty-four without having at least begun the passionate pilgrimage. His few tindery and tinselly affairs suspected of following the obvious formula: three parts curiosity, three parts the literary sense, three parts crude young impulse, one part distilled moonshine. The real love of his life had been Uncle Hugh.

He sprang up with an abruptness to which his elders seemed to be used. He stopped before a brass-trimmed desk and jerked at the second drawer. "Where are those letters, sir?"

"You mean--"

"Yes, the one you wrote her about the money, and her answer. You put them with his papers, didn't you? Where's the key?"

The older man drew from his waistcoat pocket a carved bit of brass. "What do you want with them?" he asked, cautiously.

"I want to refresh my memory--and Aunt Maria's." He took out a neat little pile of papers and began to sort them intently. "Here they are on top." He laid out a docketed envelope on the desk. "And here are the essays and poems that you wouldn't publish. I considered them the best things he ever did."

"You were not his literary executor," said his uncle, coldly. Another stifled glance passed between the seniors, but this time Miss Maria made no effort to restore the gloss of the surface. She sat idle, staring at the papers with a sort of horror.

"Put them back," she said. "Winthrop, I do think you might burn them. If you keep things like that too long the wrong people are sure to get them."

"Wait a bit. I haven't seen them for years, not since you published the collected works--with Hamlet left out." The young man lifted a worn brown-morocco portfolio tied with a frazzled red ribbon. "And here"--his voice dropped--"here is it--the letters he wrote to her and never sent. It was a sort of diary, wasn't it, going on for years? What a howling pity we couldn't print that!"

"Hugh!"

"Don't faint, Aunt Maria. You wouldn't catch me doing anything so indecent. But suppose Dante's dear family had suppressed the *Vita Nuova*. And it ought to be one of the most extraordinary human documents in the world, perfectly intimate, all the bars down, full of those flashes of his. Just the man, *ipsissimus*, that never happened but that once. Uncle Winthrop, don't you think that I might read it?"

"Do you think so? I never did."

"Oh, if you put it up to me like that! Of course I can't. But what luck that he didn't ask you to send it to her--supposing she's the wrong kind--wasn't it ..." His voice trailed off, leaving his lips foolishly open. "You don't mean--he did?"

"Yes, at the end, after you had left the room," said Mr. Fowler, firmly.

"And you--didn't? Why not?"

"As you said, for fear she was the wrong kind"

"It was too much to hope that she would be anything else," his aunt broke in, harshly. "Shut your mouth, Hugh; you look like a fool. Think what she might have done with them--she and some of those unspeakable papers."

"Oh, I see! I see!" groaned the young man. "But how awful not to do the very last thing he wanted! Did you ever try to find out what kind of a person she was?"

"She took the money. That was enough," cried Miss Fowler. "She got her share, just as though she had been his legal wife."

Hugh gave her a dazed look. "You don't mean that she was his illegal one? I never--"

"Oh no, no!" Mr. Fowler interposed. "We have no reason to think that she was otherwise than respectable. Maria, you allow most unfortunate implications to result from your choice of words. We know very little, really."

"He met her in Paris when he gave that course of lectures over there. We know that much. And she was an American student--from Virginia, wasn't it? But that was over twenty years ago. Didn't he see her after that?"

"I am sure he did not."

"She wasn't with him when he was knocking about Europe?"

"Certainly not. She came home that very year and married. As her letter states, she was a widow with three children at the time of his death."

"I have always considered it providential that he didn't know she was a widow," observed Miss Maria, primly.

Her nephew shot her a look that admitted his intermittent amusement in his aunt Maria, but definitely gave her up. He carefully leaned the portfolio inside the arm of the sofa that neighboured the desk, and picked up the long envelope.

"A copy of my letter," said Mr. Fowler.

To his sister, watching him as he watched Hugh, came the unaccountable impression that his sure and chiselled surface covered a nervous anxiety. Then Miss Maria, being a product of the same school, dismissed the idea as absurd.

Hugh raised bewildered eyes from the letters. "I can't exactly remember," he said. "I was so cut up at the time. Did I ever actually read this before or was I merely told about it? I went back for Midyear's, you know, almost at once. I know my consent was asked, but--"

"You--did not see it."

"And you, Aunt Maria, of course you knew about it!"

"Certainly," said Miss Fowler, on the defensive. "As usual in business matters, your uncle decided for me. We have been accustomed to act as a family always. To me the solidarity of the family is more than the interest of any member of it."

"Oh, I know that the Fowler family is the noblest work of God." The young man looked from one to the other as he might have regarded two strangers whose motives it was his intention to find out. "I've been brought up on that. But what I want to know now is the whyness of this letter."

"What do you mean?" Mr. Fowler's voice cut the pause like a trowel executing the middle justice on an earthworm.

"Why--why--" Hugh began, desperately. "I mean, why wasn't the money turned over to her at once--all of it?"

"It is customary to notify legatees."

"And she wasn't even a legatee," added Miss Maria, grimly. "He never made a will."

"No," said Hugh, with an ugly laugh, "he merely trusted to our promises."

There was a brief but violent silence.

"I think, Winthrop," Miss Maria broke it, "that instead of questioning the propriety of my language, you might do well to consider your nephew's."

Hugh half-tendered the letter. "You're so confoundedly clever. Uncle Winthrop. You--you just put the whole thing up to the poor woman. I can't pick out a word to show where you said it, but the tone of your letter is exactly this, 'Here's the money for you, and if you take it you're doing an unheard-of thing.' \_She\_ saw it right enough. Her answer is just defence of why she has to take it--some of it. She's a mother with three children, struggling to keep above water. She's a human animal fighting for her young. So she takes, most apologetically, most unhappily, a part of what he left her, and she hates to take that. It's the most pitiful thing--"



"Piteous," corrected Miss Maria, in a tone like a bite.

Mr. Fowler laid the tips of his fingers very delicately on his nephew's knee. "Will you show me the place or places where I make these very damaging observations?"

"That's just it. I can't pick them out, but--"

"I am sure that you cannot, because they exist only in your somewhat--shall we say, lyrical imagination? I laid the circumstances before the woman and she acted as she saw fit to act. Hugh, my dear boy, I wish that you would try to restrain your--your growing tendency to excitability. I know that this is a trying day for all of us."

"O Lord, yes! It brings it all back," said Hugh, miserably. "I'm sorry if I said anything offensive sir, but--" He gave it up. "You know I have a devil, sometimes." He gave a half-embarrassed laugh.

"Offensive--if you have said anything offensive?" Miss Fowler boiled over. "Is that all you are going to say, Winthrop? If so--"

Mr. Fowler lifted a warning hand. The house door was opening. Then the discreet steps of Gannett came up the hall, followed by something lighter and more resilient.

"At least don't give me away to the lady the very first thing," said Hugh, lightly. He shoved the papers into the drawers and swung it shut. His heart was beating quite ridiculously. He would know at last--What wouldn't he know? "Uncle Hugh's girl, Uncle Hugh's girl," he told himself, and his temperamental responsiveness to the interest and the mystery of life expanded like a sea-anemone in the Gulf Stream.

Gannett opened the door, announced in his impeccable English, "Mrs. Shirley," and was not.

\* \* \* \* \*

A very small, very graceful woman hesitated in the doorway. Hugh's first impression was surprise that there was so little of her. Then his always alert subconsciousness registered:

"A lady, yes, but a country lady; not *\_de par le monde\_*. Pleasantly rather than well dressed; those veils are out." He had met her at once with outstretched hand and the most cordial, "I am glad to see you, Mrs. Shirley." Then he mentioned the names of his aunt and uncle. He did not dare to leave anything to Aunt Maria.

That lady made a movement that might or might not have been a gesture of recognition. Mr. Fowler, who had risen, inclined his handsome head with a polite murmur and indicated a chair which faced the light. Mrs.

Shirley sat, instead, upon the edge of the sofa, which happened to be nearer. With her coming Hugh's expansiveness had suffered a sudden rebuff. A feeling of dismal conventionality permeated the room like a fog. He plumed it in vain for the wonder and the magic that ought to have been the inescapable aura of Uncle Hugh's girl. Was this the mighty ocean, was this all? She was a little nervous, too. That was a pity. Nervousness in social relations was one of the numerous things that Aunt Maria never forgave.

Then the stranger spoke, and Hugh's friendliness went out to the sound as to something familiar for which he had been waiting.

"It is very good of you to let me come," she said.

"But she must be over forty," Hugh told himself, "and her voice is young. So was his always." It was also very natural and moving and not untinged by what Miss Fowler called the Southern patois. "And her feet are young."

Mr. Fowler uttered another polite murmur. There was no help from that quarter. She made another start.

"It seemed to me--" she addressed Miss Fowler, who looked obdurate. She cast a helpless glance at the cat, who opened surprising topaz eyes and looked supercilious. Then she turned to Hugh. "It seemed to me," she said, steadily, "that I could make you understand--I mean I could express myself more clearly if I could see you, than I could by writing, but--it is rather difficult."

The overheated, inclement room waited. Hugh restrained his foot from twitching. Why didn't Aunt Maria say something? She was behaving abominably. She was still seething with her suppressed outburst like a tea-kettle under the cozy of civilization. And it was catching.

"I explained at the time, three years ago," Mrs. Shirley made the plunge, "why I took the--money at all." The hard word was out, and Hugh relaxed. "I don't know what you thought of me, but at the time it seemed like the mercy of Heaven. I had to educate the children. We were horribly poor. I was almost in despair. And I felt that if I could take it from any one I could take it from him ..."

"Yes," said Hugh, unhappily. The depression that dropped on him at intervals seemed waiting to pounce. He glanced at his uncle's judicial mask, knowing utterly the distaste for sentimental encounters that it covered. He detested his aunt's aloofness. He was almost angry with this little woman's ingenuousness that put her so candidly at their cynical mercy.

"But now," she went on, "some land we have that seemed worth nothing at the time has become very valuable. The town grew out in that direction. And my eldest boy is doing very well indeed, and my daughter is studying

for a library position."

"The short and simple annals of the poor," sighed Hugh to Hugh.

"And so," said little Mrs. Shirley, with astounding simplicity, "I came to ask you please to take it back again." She gave an involuntary sigh of relief, as though she had returned a rather valuable umbrella. Mr. Fowler's eyeglasses dropped from his nose as his eyebrows shot up.

"Good Lord!" ejaculated Miss Maria with all the unexpectedness of Galatea. "You don't really mean it?" Her bag slid to the floor and the cat became thoroughly intrigued.

"Do I understand you to say"--Mr. Fowler's voice was almost stirred--"that you wish to return my brother's legacy to the family?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Shirley, "only, it wasn't a legacy. It was merely kindness that let me have it. You never can know how kind it was. But we can get on without it now."

Mr. Fowler cleared his throat. To Hugh his manner faintly suggested the cat busy with the yarn, full of a sort of devout curiosity. "Pardon me," he said, gently, "but are you sure--have you given this matter sufficient thought? The sum is a considerable one. Your children--"

"I have talked it over with them. They feel just as I do."

"A very proper feeling," said Miss Fowler, approvingly. "I must say that I never expected it. I shall add part of my share of it to the Marian Fowler Ward in the Home for Deficient Children. A most worthy charity. Perhaps I could interest you--"

"Oh, that would be lovely!" cried Mrs. Shirley. "Anything for children.... I've already spoken to my cousin, who is a lawyer, about transferring the securities back to you."

"I shall communicate with him at once," said Mr. Fowler. His court-room manner had bourgeoned into his best drawing-room blend of faintly implied gallantry and deep consideration. One almost caught Winter getting out of the lap of Spring. Then the three heads which had unconsciously leaned together suddenly straightened up and turned in the same direction.

Hugh stood almost over them. In one hand he held his aunt's knitting, which he had mechanically rescued from the cat. Now he drew out one of the ivory needles and snapped it into accurate halves. "This is atrocious!" he said, with care and precision. His voice shook. "I shall not touch a cent of it and"--he embraced his uncle and aunt in the same devastating look--"neither will you if you have any sense of decency."

"I think--"

"It doesn't matter remotely what you--we think sir. What matters is what Uncle Hugh thought." He turned to Mrs. Shirley with an extraordinary softening of tone. "Couldn't you keep it? When he died ... in the room over this"--with a little gasp her glance flew to the ceiling as though this topographical detail had brought her a sharp realization of that long-past scene--"he made us promise that you should have it, all of it. He felt that you needed it; he worried about it."

"Oh, how kind of him--how kind!" cried the little woman. The poignancy of her voice cut into his disappointment like a sharp ray of light. "Even then--to think of me. But don't you understand that he wouldn't want me to--to take anything that I felt I ought not to take?"

"That's the way out," rippled across Mr. Fowler's face. He was experiencing a variety of mental disturbances, but this came to the surface just in time for Hugh to catch it.

"Oh well," he murmured, wearily. "Only, none for this deficient child, thank you." He walked to the window and stood looking out into the blown spring green of the elm opposite. His ebbed anger had left a residuum of stubbornness. There was still an act of justice to be consummated and the position of grand-justicer offered a certain righteous attraction. As he reminded himself, if you put your will to work on a difficult action you were fain to commit, after a while the will worked automatically and your mind functioned without aid from you, and the action bloomed of itself. This kinetic process was a constant device of the freakish impulse that he called his devil. He deliberately laid the train.

"There is one more thing," the alien was saying. Her voice had gained a wonderful fluency amid the general thaw. "I didn't dare to ask before, but if we thought of me then--I have always hoped he left some message for me ... a letter, perhaps."

Hugh smiled agreeably. "In just a moment," he considered, "I am going to do something so outrageous that I can't even imagine how my dear families are going to take it." He was about to hurt them severely, but that was all right. His uncle was a tempered weapon of war that despised quarter; and as for Aunt Maria, he rather wanted to hurt Aunt Maria for her own good.

Into the eloquent and mendacious silence that was a gift of their caste the voice fell humbly: "So there wasn't? I suppose I oughtn't to have expected it."

"Any time now, Gridley," Hugh signalled to his familiar. Like a response, a thin breeze tickled the roots of his hair. He swung around with the pivot of a definite purpose. With an economy of movement that would have contented an efficiency expert he set a straight fiddle-backed chair squarely in front of Uncle Hugh's girl and settled

himself in it with his back to his own people.

"Mrs. Shirley," he began, quietly, "will you talk to me, please? I hope I shan't startle you, but there are things I absolutely have to know, and this is my one chance. I am entirely determined not to let it slip. Talk to me, please, not to them. As you have doubtless noticed, though excellent people where the things not flatly of this world are concerned, my uncle is a graven image and my aunt is a deaf mute. As for me, I am just unbalanced enough to understand anything." He was aware of the rustle of consternation behind him and hurried on, ignoring that and whatever else might be happening there. "That's what I'm banking on now. I intend to say my say and they are going to allow it, because it is dangerous to thwart queer people--very dangerous indeed. You know, they thwarted Uncle Hugh in every possible way. My grandfather was a composite of those two, and all of them adored my uncle and contradicted him and watched him until he went over the border. And they're so dead scared that I'm going to follow him some day that they let me do quite as I please." He passed his hand across his eyes as though brushing away cobwebs. "Will you be so good as to put your veil up."

"Why--why, certainly!" Mrs. Shirley faltered. She uncovered her face and Hugh nodded to the witness within.

"Yes, he'd have liked that," he told himself. "Lots of expression and those beautiful haunted shadows about the eyes." He laughed gently. "Don't look so frightened. I don't bite. Just humour me, as Uncle Winthrop is signalling you to do. You understand, don't you, that Uncle Hugh was the romance and the adventure of my life? I'm still saturated with him, but there was lots of him that I could never get through to. There never was a creature better worth knowing, and he couldn't show me, or else I had blind spots. There were vast tracts of undiscovered country in him, as far as I was concerned--lands of wonder, east of the sun and west of the moon--that sort of thing. But I knew that there was a certain woman who must have been there, who held the heart of the mystery, and to-day, when this incredible chance came--when you came--I made up my mind that I was not going to be restrained nor baffled by the customs of my tribe. I want the truth and I'm prepared to give it. From the shoulder. If you will tell me everything you know about him I promise to tell you everything I know. You'll want to--" The sound of the closing door made him turn. The room behind him was empty. His manner quieted instantly. "That's uncommonly tactful of them.... You won't think that they meant any discourtesy by leaving?" he added, anxiously. "They wouldn't do that."

"Oh, I'm sure not! Your uncle made me understand," faltered Mrs. Shirley. "They knew you could speak more freely without them."

"He's wonderful with the wireless," Hugh agreed. "But they were in terror, anyway, as to how freely I was about to speak before them. They can't stand this. Everything really human seems pretty well alien to Uncle Winthrop. He's exhibit A of the people who consider civilization

a mistake. And my aunt Maria is a truly good woman--charities and all that--but if you put a rabbit in her brain it would incontinently curl up and die in convulsions."

She laughed helplessly, and Hugh reported an advance.

"Nevertheless," he added quaintly, "we don't really dislike each other."

"I'm the last of the family, you see; I'm the future.... Can't we skip the preliminaries?" he broke out. "You don't feel that I am a stranger, do you?" He halted on the verge of the confidence that he found no barrier in her advanced age. He knew plenty of women of forty who had never grown up much and who met him on perfectly equal terms. This, however, was a case by itself. He plunged back into the memories of Uncle Hugh. He spoke of his charm, his outlook on life, sometimes curiously veiled, often uncannily clairvoyant; his periods of restless suffering tending to queer, unsocial impulses; then the flowering of an interval of hard work and its reward of almost supernatural joy.

"He used to go around in a rainbow," said Hugh, "a sort of holy soap bubble. I hardly dared to speak to him for fear of breaking it. It came with a new inspiration, and while it lasted nothing on earth was so important. Then when it was finished he never wanted to see the thing again."

"Go on," said his listener. Her grey eyes plumbed his with a child's directness. He was conscious of his will playing on her. He was keeping his part of the contract, but he was also breaking the way for hers. He must not let them go for a moment, those grey eyes like a girl's that grew absent-minded so easily. Only a little more and his mood would curve around both them, a glamorous mist of feeling.

"You go on," he murmured. "Can't you see how much I want you to? Can't you feel how much I'm the right person to know?"

"I could never tell any one. You want--"

"Anything, everything. You must have known him better than anybody in he world did."

"I think so," she said, slowly "And I saw him alone only twice in my life."

For some time he had sat with his long fingers over his mouth, afraid of checking her by an untimely word.

"Of course I was in his classes. You know he had an extraordinary success; he struck twelve at once, as they say there. The French really discovered him as a poet, just as Mallarmé discovered Poe; some of them used that parallel. And the girls--he was a *matinée* idol and a cult--even the French girls. We went into that classroom thrilling as we

never went to any ball. I worked that winter for him harder than I had ever worked in my life, and about Easter he began to single me out for the most merciless fault-finding. That was his way of showing that he considered you worth while. He had a habit of standing over you in class, holding your paper like a knout. And once or twice--I called myself a conceited little idiot--but once or twice--"

Hugh nodded. His pulses were singing like morning stars at the spectacle of a new world.

"He used to say of a certain excited, happy feeling, a sort of fey feeling, that you seemed to have swallowed a heavenly pigeon. And--well, he looked like that. But I knocked my vanity on the head and told it, 'Down to the other dogs.' I was used to young men; I knew how little such manifestations could mean. But after that I used to set little lines in the things I wrote for him, very delicately, and sometimes I fancied I had caught a fish. It was most exciting."

Hugh again impersonated a Chinese mandarin.

"You see, he allowed so few people to know him, he moved with such difficulty in that formally laid-out small, professional world, with its endless leaving of cards and showing yourself on the proper days. I think they considered him a sort of Huron afflicted with genius, and forgave him. He ran away from them, he fought them off. And to feel that there was a magic spiderweb between this creature and me, new every day and invisible to everybody else and dripping with poetry like dewdrops! Can't you fancy the intoxication? I was nineteen.... I had engaged myself to be married to Beverly Shirley. I had known him all my life--before I left home--but I had absolutely no conviction of disloyalty. This was different; this was another life."

"Another you," agreed Hugh, as one who took exotic states of mind for granted.

"Well, yes.... It was one of the awful at-homes of Madame Normand's. She took American girls *en pension*, and she was supposed to look after us severely; but as she was an American herself, of course she gave us a great deal of liberty. She was the wife of a *professeur*, and she had rather an imposing *salon*, so she received just so often, and you had to go or she never stopped asking you why. You have been to those French receptions?"

"Where they serve music and syrup and little hard cakes, and you carry away the impression of a lordly function because of the scenery and the manners? Indeed yes!"

"I slid away after a while, out upon the iron balcony, filled with new lilacs, that overhung the garden. Something had hurt my little feelings; a letter hadn't come, perhaps. I remember how dark and warm the night was, like a gulf under me, and the stars and the lights of Paris seemed

very much alike and rather disappointing. Then I heard his voice behind me, and I was as overwhelmed as--as Daphne or Danaë or one of those pagan ladies might have been when the god came.

"He said, 'What are you doing, hanging over this dark, romantic chasm?' And I just had presence of mind enough to play up.

"'Naturally, I'm waiting for a phantom lover.' Then the answer to that flashed on me and I said in a hurry, 'I thought you never came to these things.'

"'I came to see you'--he really said it--and then, 'And--am I sufficiently demoniacal?' And he \_had\_ swallowed a pigeon.

"'Oh dear, no!' said I. 'You are much too respectable. You are from Boston.'

"'And you from Virginia,' said he. 'I hear that a certain Stewart once unjustifiably claimed kinship with your branch of the family and has since been known as the Pretender.'

"'That is quite true,' said I. 'And I hear that once when the Ark ran aground a little voice was heard piping: 'Save me! save me! I am a Fowler of Boston!'

"That was the silly way we began. Isn't it incredible?"

"He could be silly--that was one of the lovable things," Hugh mused. "And he could say the most nakedly natural things. But he generally used the mandarin dialect. He thought in it, I suppose."

"No," the stranger corrected him. "He thought in thoughts. Brilliant people always do. The words just wait like a--a--"

"Layette," said Hugh. "What else did he say?"

"The next I remember we were leaning together, all but touching. And he was telling me about the little green gate."

Hugh's hand shut. "He always called it that. Was he thinking of it even then?"

"Oh yes!"

"He never was like a person of this world," said Hugh, under his breath.

"The loneliest creature I ever knew."

They fell silent, like two old friends whose sorrow is the same.

"He believed," Hugh went on, after a moment, "that when life became



intolerable you had a perfect right to take the shortest way out. And he thought of it as a little green gate, swinging with its shadow in the twilight so that a touch would let you into the sweetest, dimmest old garden."

"But he loved life."

"Sometimes. The colour of it and the unexpectedness. He believed the word didn't have any definite plan, but just wandered along the road and picked up adventures. And he loved that. He said God made a new earth every day and he rather fancied a new heaven oftener. But he got so dead tired at the end, homesick for the underground.... I wonder ..."

The little woman was looking past him, straight into an evocation of a vanished presence that was so real, so nearly tangible, that Hugh was forced to lay violent hands upon his absurd impulse to glance over his shoulder "I wouldn't let him," she said, in a tone the young man had never heard before.

"You mean ..."

"I couldn't bear it. I made him promise me that he wouldn't. I can't tell you that. We talked for a long time and the night was full of doom. He was tired then, but that wasn't all. He felt what was coming--the Shadow ... and he was in terror. What he dreaded most was that it might change him in some way, make him something beastly and devilish--he who had always loved whatever was lovely and merciful and of good report."

Hugh got up with a shudder. "Hush!" he said, sharply. "It's too ghastly. Don't tell me any more about it." He wandered across the room, pulling a leaf from the azaleas, stopping at the window for a long look out. The wind was blowing some riotous young clouds over the sky like inarticulate shouts. There was an arrogant bird in the elm; there were pert crocus-buds in the window-boxes. The place was full of foolhardy little dare-devils who trusted their fate and might never find it out. After all, that was the way to live--as long as one was allowed. He turned suddenly with his whimsical smile. "I look out o' window quite a bit," he explained, "well, because of my aunt Maria." When he sat down again in the Sheraton chair Mrs. Shirley shifted her story to the plane of the smile.

"I don't know how late it was when Madame Normand popped her head out of the balcony door."

"Who was then surprised? It was the lady,' as dear old Brantome says?"

"It was everybody. The company had gone and Mélanie the *\_bonne\_* was putting out the candles.

"Miss Stewart and I have just discovered that we are very nearly related," said he.

"But how delightful," said Madame, thoroughly annoyed."

"And the other time," Hugh hinted. What he wanted to say was, "So you prevented it, you kept him here, God bless you!" His natural resilience had asserted itself. Vistas were opening. The Hugh who accepted life for what it was worth was again in the ascendant, but he found a second to call up the other Hugh, whose legal residence was somewhere near the threshold of consciousness, to take notice. He had always known that there must have been something in Uncle Hugh's girl.

"That was a few days later, the afternoon before I left Paris. I went quite suddenly. Somebody was sick at home, and I had the chance to travel with some friends who were going. He had sent me flowers--no, not roses."

"Narcissus?"

"Yes. Old Monsieur Normand was scandalized; it seems one doesn't send yellow flowers to a *jeune fille*. To me it was the most incredibly thoughtful and original thing. All the other girls had gone with Madame to a very special piano recital, in spite of a drizzling rain. It had turned cool, too, I remember, because there was a wood fire in the little sitting-room--not the *salon*, but the girls' room. Being an American, Madame was almost lavish about fires. And it was a most un-French room, the most careless little place, where the second-best piano lived, and the lilacs, when they were taken in out of the cold. There were sweet old curtains, and a long sofa in front of the fireplace instead of the traditional armchairs. Anybody's books and bibelots lay about. I was playing."

"What?" This was important.

"What would a girl play, over twenty years ago, in Paris? In the *crépuscule*, with the lilacs that *embaument*, as they say there, and with a sort of panic in her mind? Because, after all, the man to whom one is engaged is a man whom one knows very slightly."

"Absolutely," said Hugh.

"And I didn't want to leave Paris.... Of course I was playing Chopin bits, with an ache in my heart to match, that I couldn't bear and was enjoying to the utmost. What do girls play now? Then all of us had attacks of Chopin. Madame used to laugh and say, 'I hear the harbour bar still moaning,' and order that particular girl's favourite dessert. She spoiled us. And Monsieur would say something about *si jeunesse savait*. He was a nice old man, not very successful; his colleagues patronized him. Oh yes he was obvious!

"And then Mélanie opened the door and announced, '*Monsieur, le cousin de Mademoiselle*.' I don't know what made her do it except a general

wish to be kind. She remembered from the other night, and, besides, she hated to attempt English names; she made salmi of them."

Hugh had ceased to hold her eyes long ago. They looked into the window's square of light. He had no wish to intrude his presence. She was finding it natural to tell him, just as he had acknowledged her right to explore the intimate places of his soul. Things simply happened that way sometimes, and one was humbly thankful.

"Go on," he said. "Don't stop." He sat in a corner of the sofa, and for a while the impetus of my start carried me on. Then the bottom dropped out of Chopin. I went over and sat in the other corner. It was a long sofa; it felt as long as the world.

"Do you remember that heart-breakingly beautiful voice of his that could make you feel anything he was feeling? It was like magic. He said at last:

"So you are going home to be married?"

"I nodded.

"Betty," he said, "are you happy, quite happy, about everything?"

"Oh yes!" I said. "Oh yes, Professor Fowler!" The curious thing about it was that I spoke the truth when I considered it seriously.

"He said, 'Then that's all right.' Then he laughed a little and said, 'Do you always call me Professor Fowler, even when you shut your door on the world at night and are all alone with God and the silence?'

"And Claudia Jones," I added, stupidly.

"He considered that seriously and said, 'I didn't know about Claudia Jones; she may inhibit even the silence and the other ingredient. I suppose you call me Teacher.'

"I cried out at that. 'I might call you \_cher maître\_, as they do her.'

"He said, 'That may do for the present.'

"We looked into the fire and the lilacs filled the pause as adequately as Chopin could have done. All at once he got up and came over to me--it seemed the most natural thing in the world--across that wilderness of sofa.

"I suppose," he said, "that you won't let me off that promise."

"No, no!" I cried, all my old panic flooding over me again. I threw my hands out, and suddenly he had caught them in his and was holding me half away from him, and he was saying, in that tragic voice of his:

"No, no! But give me something to make it bearable."

"Allah, the compassionate!" sighed Hugh, in ecstasy. He had never dared hope for all this. His very being went on tiptoe for fear of breathing too loud.

"We sat there for ages and ages, gazing into the fire, not saying a word. Then he spoke ... every now and then. He said:

"The horrible thing would have been never to have known you. Now that I've touched you I'm magnetized for life. I can't lose you again."

"It isn't I," I told him. "It's only what you think me."

"You are the only creature outside of myself that I ever found myself in," he said. "And I could look into you like Narcissus until I died. You are home and Nirvana. That's what you are. When I look at you I believe in God. You gallantest, most foolhardy, little, fragile thing, you, you're not afraid of anything. You trust this rotten life, don't you? You expect to find lovely things everywhere, and you will, just because they'll spring up around your feet. You'll save your world like all redeemers simply by being in it."

"No woman ever had such things said to her as he said to me. But most of the time we said nothing. There wasn't any past or future; there was only the touch of his shoulder and his hands all around mine. It was like coming in out of the cold; it was like being on a hill above the sea, and listening to the wind in the pines until you don't know which is the wind and which is you....

"It couldn't last forever. After a while something like a little point of pain began worrying my mind.

"But there won't be.... This is good-bye," I cried.

"Don't you believe it," he said. "God Himself couldn't make us say good-bye again." He got up and drew me with him. It was quite dark now except for the fire, and his eyes ... they were like those of the Djinnns who were made out of elemental fire instead of earth. "You'll come to me in the blessed sunshine," he said, "and in music, and in the best impulses of my own soul. If I were an old-fashioned lover I should promise to wait for you in heaven.... Betty, Betty, I have you in heaven now and forever!" ... I felt his cheek on mine. Then he was gone. That was all; that was every bit of all."

"And he had that to live on for the rest of his life." Hugh broke the silence under his breath. "Well, thank God he had \_something\_!"

The little woman fumbled in her bag for a handkerchief and shamelessly dried her eyes. As she moved, a brown object fell from the corner of the

couch across her lap. Hugh held his hand out for the morocco portfolio.

"It seems to have the homing instinct," he observed; then, abruptly, "Wait a moment; I'm going to call them back." He paused, as usual, before his favourite confidant, the window. "The larger consciousness, the Universal Togetherness," he muttered. "I really believe he must have touched it that once. O Lord! how--" His spacious vocabulary gave it up.

When he followed his uncle and aunt into the room Mrs. Shirley came forward, her thin veil again covering her face.

"I must go," she said. "Thank you once more for letting me come."

With a curious young touch of solemnity Hugh laid the brown case in her hands. "This belongs to you," he said, "and I wanted them to see you receive it."

\* \* \* \* \*

"And you intend to permit this, Winthrop?"

Miss Fowler turned on her brother. She had suppressed her emotions before the intruder; she had even said some proper things without unduly speeding the parting guest. But if you can't be hateful to your own family, to whom, in the name of the domestic pieties, can you be hateful?

Mr. Fowler swiveled on her the glassy eye of one who does not suffer fools gladly. "I permit anything," he responded, icily, "that will keep that boy ... sane." He retired anew behind the monastic newspaper and rattled it.

Miss Maria received a sudden chill apprehension that Winthrop was looking much older lately. "But--" she faltered. Then she resolutely returned to the baiting. "I suppose you recall her saying that she has a daughter. Probably," admitted Miss Maria, grudgingly, "an attractive daughter."

"It might be a very good thing," said the world-weary voice, and left her gasping. "Two excellent Virginia families." He faced his sister's appalled expression. "He might do something much more impossible--marry a cheap actress or go into a monastery. His behaviour to-day prepares me for anything. And"--a note of difficulty came into what Hugh had once called his uncle's chiselled voice--"you do not appear to realize, Maria, that what Mrs. Shirley has done is rather a remarkable thing, a thing that you and I, with our undoubted appreciation of the value of money, should probably have felt that we could not afford to do."

Hugh came in blithely, bringing a spring-smelling whiff of outdoors with him. "I got her a taxi," he announced, "and she asked me to come down to their place for Easter. There's a hunting club. Oh cheer up, Aunt Maria!

At least she left the money behind."

"Look at my needle!" cried the long-suffering lady. "\_You\_ did that. I must say, Hugh, I find your conduct most disrespectful."

"All right, I grovel," Hugh agreed, pleasantly. He picked up the cat and rubbed her tenderly the wrong way.

"As for the money, I don't see how her conscience could have allowed her to accept everything. And she married somebody else, too."

"So did Dante's girl. That doesn't seem to make all the difference. Conscience?" Hugh went on, absently. "Conscience? Haven't I heard that word somewhere before? You are the only person I know, Aunt Maria, who has a really good, staunch, weather-proof one, because, like the laws of the Medes and Persians, it altereth not."

"I should hope not, indeed," said Miss Fowler, half mollified.

Hugh smiled sleepily. The cat opened one yellow eye and moved mystified whiskers. She profoundly distrusted this affectionate young admirer. Was she being stroked the wrong way or ruffled the right way?

"Tiger, tiger, burning bright," murmured Hugh. "Puzzle, Kitty: find the Adventuress."



## ADVENTURE III. THE STOCK-BROKER'S CLERK

Project Gutenberg's *Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes*, by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

Shortly after my marriage I had bought a connection in the Paddington district. Old Mr. Farquhar, from whom I purchased it, had at one time an excellent general practice; but his age, and an affliction of the nature of St. Vitus's dance from which he suffered, had very much thinned it. The public not unnaturally goes on the principle that he who would heal others must himself be whole, and looks askance at the curative powers of the man whose own case is beyond the reach of his drugs. Thus as my predecessor weakened his practice declined, until when I purchased it from him it had sunk from twelve hundred to little more than three hundred a year. I had confidence, however, in my own youth and energy, and was convinced that in a very few years the concern would be as flourishing as ever.

For three months after taking over the practice I was kept very closely at work, and saw little of my friend Sherlock Holmes, for I was too busy to visit Baker Street, and he seldom went anywhere himself save upon professional business. I was surprised, therefore, when, one morning in June, as I sat reading the British Medical Journal after breakfast, I heard a ring at the bell, followed by the high, somewhat strident tones of my old companion's voice.

"Ah, my dear Watson," said he, striding into the room, "I am very delighted to see you! I trust that Mrs. Watson has entirely recovered from all the little excitements connected with our adventure of the Sign of Four."

"Thank you, we are both very well," said I, shaking him warmly by the hand.

"And I hope, also," he continued, sitting down in the rocking-chair, "that the cares of medical practice have not entirely obliterated the interest which you used to take in our little deductive problems."

"On the contrary," I answered, "it was only last night that I was looking over my old notes, and classifying some of our past results."

"I trust that you don't consider your collection closed."

"Not at all. I should wish nothing better than to have some more of such experiences."

"To-day, for example?"

"Yes, to-day, if you like."

"And as far off as Birmingham?"

"Certainly, if you wish it."

"And the practice?"

"I do my neighbor's when he goes. He is always ready to work off the debt."

"Ha! Nothing could be better," said Holmes, leaning back in his chair and looking keenly at me from under his half closed lids. "I perceive that you have been unwell lately. Summer colds are always a little trying."

"I was confined to the house by a severe chill for three days last week. I thought, however, that I had cast off every trace of it."

"So you have. You look remarkably robust."

"How, then, did you know of it?"

"My dear fellow, you know my methods."

"You deduced it, then?"

"Certainly."

"And from what?"

"From your slippers."

I glanced down at the new patent leathers which I was wearing. "How on earth--" I began, but Holmes answered my question before it was asked.

"Your slippers are new," he said. "You could not have had them more than a few weeks. The soles which you are at this moment presenting to me are slightly scorched. For a moment I thought they might have got wet and been burned in the drying. But near the instep there is a small circular wafer of paper with the shopman's hieroglyphics upon it. Damp would of course have removed this. You had, then, been sitting with your feet outstretched to the fire, which a man would hardly do even in so wet a June as this if he were in his full health."

Like all Holmes's reasoning the thing seemed simplicity itself when it was once explained. He read the thought upon my features, and his smile had a tinge of bitterness.

"I am afraid that I rather give myself away when I explain," said he. "Results without causes are much more impressive. You are ready to come to Birmingham, then?"

"Certainly. What is the case?"

"You shall hear it all in the train. My client is outside in a four-wheeler. Can you come at once?"

"In an instant." I scribbled a note to my neighbor, rushed upstairs to explain the matter to my wife, and joined Holmes upon the door-step.

"Your neighbor is a doctor," said he, nodding at the brass plate.

"Yes; he bought a practice as I did."

"An old-established one?"

"Just the same as mine. Both have been ever since the houses were built."

"Ah! Then you got hold of the best of the two."



"I think I did. But how do you know?"

"By the steps, my boy. Yours are worn three inches deeper than his. But this gentleman in the cab is my client, Mr. Hall Pycroft. Allow me to introduce you to him. Whip your horse up, cabby, for we have only just time to catch our train."

The man whom I found myself facing was a well built, fresh-complexioned young fellow, with a frank, honest face and a slight, crisp, yellow mustache. He wore a very shiny top hat and a neat suit of sober black, which made him look what he was--a smart young City man, of the class who have been labeled cockneys, but who give us our crack volunteer regiments, and who turn out more fine athletes and sportsmen than any body of men in these islands. His round, ruddy face was naturally full of cheeriness, but the corners of his mouth seemed to me to be pulled down in a half-comical distress. It was not, however, until we were all in a first-class carriage and well started upon our journey to Birmingham that I was able to learn what the trouble was which had driven him to Sherlock Holmes.

"We have a clear run here of seventy minutes," Holmes remarked. "I want you, Mr. Hall Pycroft, to tell my friend your very interesting experience exactly as you have told it to me, or with more detail if possible. It will be of use to me to hear the succession of events again. It is a case, Watson, which may prove to have something in it, or may prove to have nothing, but which, at least, presents those unusual and outré features which are as dear to you as they are to me. Now, Mr. Pycroft, I shall not interrupt you again."

Our young companion looked at me with a twinkle in his eye.

"The worst of the story is," said he, "that I show myself up as such a confounded fool. Of course it may work out all right, and I don't see that I could have done otherwise; but if I have lost my crib and get nothing in exchange I shall feel what a soft Johnnie I have been. I'm not very good at telling a story, Dr. Watson, but it is like this with me:

"I used to have a billet at Coxon & Woodhouse's, of Draper's Gardens, but they were let in early in the spring through the Venezuelan loan, as no doubt you remember, and came a nasty cropper. I had been with them five years, and old Coxon gave me a ripping good testimonial when the smash came, but of course we clerks were all turned adrift, the twenty-seven of us. I tried here and tried there, but there were lots of other chaps on the same lay as myself, and it was a perfect frost for a long time. I had been taking three pounds a week at Coxon's, and I had saved about seventy of them, but I soon worked my way through that and out at the other end. I was fairly at the end of my tether at last, and could hardly find the stamps to answer the advertisements or the envelopes to stick them to. I had worn out my boots paddling up office stairs, and I seemed just as far from getting a billet as ever.

"At last I saw a vacancy at Mawson & Williams's, the great stock-broking firm in Lombard Street. I dare say E. C. Is not much in your line, but I can tell you that this is about the richest house in London.

The advertisement was to be answered by letter only. I sent in my testimonial and application, but without the least hope of getting it. Back came an answer by return, saying that if I would appear next Monday I might take over my new duties at once, provided that my appearance was satisfactory. No one knows how these things are worked. Some people say that the manager just plunges his hand into the heap and takes the first that comes. Anyhow it was my innings that time, and I don't ever wish to feel better pleased. The screw was a pound a week rise, and the duties just about the same as at Coxon's.

"And now I come to the queer part of the business. I was in diggings out Hampstead way, 17 Potter's Terrace. Well, I was sitting doing a smoke that very evening after I had been promised the appointment, when up came my landlady with a card which had 'Arthur Pinner, Financial Agent,' printed upon it. I had never heard the name before and could not imagine what he wanted with me; but, of course, I asked her to show him up. In he walked, a middle-sized, dark-haired, dark-eyed, black-bearded man, with a touch of the Sheeny about his nose. He had a brisk kind of way with him and spoke sharply, like a man who knew the value of time."

"'Mr. Hall Pycroft, I believe?'" said he.

"'Yes, sir,' I answered, pushing a chair towards him.

"'Lately engaged at Coxon & Woodhouse's?'

"'Yes, sir.'

"'And now on the staff of Mawson's.'

"'Quite so.'

"'Well,' said he, 'the fact is that I have heard some really extraordinary stories about your financial ability. You remember Parker, who used to be Coxon's manager? He can never say enough about it.'

"Of course I was pleased to hear this. I had always been pretty sharp in the office, but I had never dreamed that I was talked about in the City in this fashion.

"'You have a good memory?' said he.

"'Pretty fair,' I answered, modestly.

"'Have you kept in touch with the market while you have been out of work?' he asked.

"Yes. I read the stock exchange list every morning."

"Now that shows real application!" he cried. "That is the way to prosper! You won't mind my testing you, will you? Let me see. How are Ayrshires?"

"A hundred and six and a quarter to a hundred and five and seven-eighths."

"And New Zealand consolidated?"

"A hundred and four."

"And British Broken Hills?"

"Seven to seven-and-six."

"Wonderful!" he cried, with his hands up. "This quite fits in with all that I had heard. My boy, my boy, you are very much too good to be a clerk at Mawson's!"

"This outburst rather astonished me, as you can think. 'Well,' said I, 'other people don't think quite so much of me as you seem to do, Mr. Pinner. I had a hard enough fight to get this berth, and I am very glad to have it.'"

"Pooh, man; you should soar above it. You are not in your true sphere. Now, I'll tell you how it stands with me. What I have to offer is little enough when measured by your ability, but when compared with Mawson's, it's light to dark. Let me see. When do you go to Mawson's?"

"On Monday."

"Ha, ha! I think I would risk a little sporting flutter that you don't go there at all."

"Not go to Mawson's?"

"No, sir. By that day you will be the business manager of the Franco-Midland Hardware Company, Limited, with a hundred and thirty-four branches in the towns and villages of France, not counting one in Brussels and one in San Remo."

"This took my breath away. 'I never heard of it,' said I."

"Very likely not. It has been kept very quiet, for the capital was all privately subscribed, and it's too good a thing to let the public into. My brother, Harry Pinner, is promoter, and joins the board after allotment as managing director. He knew I was in the swim down here, and asked me to pick up a good man cheap. A young, pushing man with plenty of snap about him. Parker spoke of you, and that brought me here"

to-night. We can only offer you a beggarly five hundred to start with.'

"Five hundred a year!' I shouted.

"Only that at the beginning; but you are to have an overriding commission of one per cent on all business done by your agents, and you may take my word for it that this will come to more than your salary.'

"But I know nothing about hardware.'

"Tut, my boy; you know about figures.'

"My head buzzed, and I could hardly sit still in my chair. But suddenly a little chill of doubt came upon me.

"I must be frank with you,' said I. 'Mawson only gives me two hundred, but Mawson is safe. Now, really, I know so little about your company that--'

"Ah, smart, smart!' he cried, in a kind of ecstasy of delight. 'You are the very man for us. You are not to be talked over, and quite right, too. Now, here's a note for a hundred pounds, and if you think that we can do business you may just slip it into your pocket as an advance upon your salary.'

"That is very handsome,' said I. 'When should I take over my new duties?'

"Be in Birmingham to-morrow at one,' said he. 'I have a note in my pocket here which you will take to my brother. You will find him at 126b Corporation Street, where the temporary offices of the company are situated. Of course he must confirm your engagement, but between ourselves it will be all right.'

"Really, I hardly know how to express my gratitude, Mr. Pinner,' said I.

"Not at all, my boy. You have only got your deserts. There are one or two small things--mere formalities--which I must arrange with you. You have a bit of paper beside you there. Kindly write upon it 'I am perfectly willing to act as business manager to the Franco-Midland Hardware Company, Limited, at a minimum salary of L500.'"

"I did as he asked, and he put the paper in his pocket.

"There is one other detail,' said he. 'What do you intend to do about Mawson's?'

"I had forgotten all about Mawson's in my joy. 'I'll write and resign,' said I.

"Precisely what I don't want you to do. I had a row over you with Mawson's manager. I had gone up to ask him about you, and he was very offensive; accused me of coaxing you away from the service of the firm, and that sort of thing. At last I fairly lost my temper. "If you want good men you should pay them a good price," said I.'

"He would rather have our small price than your big one,' said he.

"I'll lay you a fiver,' said I, 'that when he has my offer you'll never so much as hear from him again.'

"Done!' said he. 'We picked him out of the gutter, and he won't leave us so easily.' Those were his very words."

"The impudent scoundrel!' I cried. 'I've never so much as seen him in my life. Why should I consider him in any way? I shall certainly not write if you would rather I didn't.'

"Good! That's a promise,' said he, rising from his chair. 'Well, I'm delighted to have got so good a man for my brother. Here's your advance of a hundred pounds, and here is the letter. Make a note of the address, 126b Corporation Street, and remember that one o'clock to-morrow is your appointment. Good-night; and may you have all the fortune that you deserve!'

"That's just about all that passed between us, as near as I can remember. You can imagine, Dr. Watson, how pleased I was at such an extraordinary bit of good fortune. I sat up half the night hugging myself over it, and next day I was off to Birmingham in a train that would take me in plenty time for my appointment. I took my things to a hotel in New Street, and then I made my way to the address which had been given me.

"It was a quarter of an hour before my time, but I thought that would make no difference. 126b was a passage between two large shops, which led to a winding stone stair, from which there were many flats, let as offices to companies or professional men. The names of the occupants were painted at the bottom on the wall, but there was no such name as the Franco-Midland Hardware Company, Limited. I stood for a few minutes with my heart in my boots, wondering whether the whole thing was an elaborate hoax or not, when up came a man and addressed me. He was very like the chap I had seen the night before, the same figure and voice, but he was clean shaven and his hair was lighter.

"Are you Mr. Hall Pycroft?' he asked.

"Yes,' said I.

"Oh! I was expecting you, but you are a trifle before your time. I had a note from my brother this morning in which he sang your praises very loudly.'

"I was just looking for the offices when you came.

"We have not got our name up yet, for we only secured these temporary premises last week. Come up with me, and we will talk the matter over."

"I followed him to the top of a very lofty stair, and there, right under the slates, were a couple of empty, dusty little rooms, uncarpeted and uncurtained, into which he led me. I had thought of a great office with shining tables and rows of clerks, such as I was used to, and I dare say I stared rather straight at the two deal chairs and one little table, which, with a ledger and a waste paper basket, made up the whole furniture.

"Don't be disheartened, Mr. Pycroft," said my new acquaintance, seeing the length of my face. "Rome was not built in a day, and we have lots of money at our backs, though we don't cut much dash yet in offices. Pray sit down, and let me have your letter."

"I gave it to him, and he read it over very carefully.

"You seem to have made a vast impression upon my brother Arthur," said he; "and I know that he is a pretty shrewd judge. He swears by London, you know; and I by Birmingham; but this time I shall follow his advice. Pray consider yourself definitely engaged."

"What are my duties?" I asked.

"You will eventually manage the great depot in Paris, which will pour a flood of English crockery into the shops of a hundred and thirty-four agents in France. The purchase will be completed in a week, and meanwhile you will remain in Birmingham and make yourself useful."

"How?"

"For answer, he took a big red book out of a drawer.

"This is a directory of Paris," said he, "with the trades after the names of the people. I want you to take it home with you, and to mark off all the hardware sellers, with their addresses. It would be of the greatest use to me to have them."

"Surely there are classified lists?" I suggested.

"Not reliable ones. Their system is different from ours. Stick at it, and let me have the lists by Monday, at twelve. Good-day, Mr. Pycroft. If you continue to show zeal and intelligence you will find the company a good master."

"I went back to the hotel with the big book under my arm, and with very conflicting feelings in my breast. On the one hand, I was definitely

engaged and had a hundred pounds in my pocket; on the other, the look of the offices, the absence of name on the wall, and other of the points which would strike a business man had left a bad impression as to the position of my employers. However, come what might, I had my money, so I settled down to my task. All Sunday I was kept hard at work, and yet by Monday I had only got as far as H. I went round to my employer, found him in the same dismantled kind of room, and was told to keep at it until Wednesday, and then come again. On Wednesday it was still unfinished, so I hammered away until Friday--that is, yesterday. Then I brought it round to Mr. Harry Pinner.

"Thank you very much," said he; "I fear that I underrated the difficulty of the task. This list will be of very material assistance to me."

"It took some time," said I.

"And now," said he, "I want you to make a list of the furniture shops, for they all sell crockery."

"Very good."

"And you can come up to-morrow evening, at seven, and let me know how you are getting on. Don't overwork yourself. A couple of hours at Day's Music Hall in the evening would do you no harm after your labors." He laughed as he spoke, and I saw with a thrill that his second tooth upon the left-hand side had been very badly stuffed with gold."

Sherlock Holmes rubbed his hands with delight, and I stared with astonishment at our client.

"You may well look surprised, Dr. Watson; but it is this way," said he: "When I was speaking to the other chap in London, at the time that he laughed at my not going to Mawson's, I happened to notice that his tooth was stuffed in this very identical fashion. The glint of the gold in each case caught my eye, you see. When I put that with the voice and figure being the same, and only those things altered which might be changed by a razor or a wig, I could not doubt that it was the same man. Of course you expect two brothers to be alike, but not that they should have the same tooth stuffed in the same way. He bowed me out, and I found myself in the street, hardly knowing whether I was on my head or my heels. Back I went to my hotel, put my head in a basin of cold water, and tried to think it out. Why had he sent me from London to Birmingham? Why had he got there before me? And why had he written a letter from himself to himself? It was altogether too much for me, and I could make no sense of it. And then suddenly it struck me that what was dark to me might be very light to Mr. Sherlock Holmes. I had just time to get up to town by the night train to see him this morning, and to bring you both back with me to Birmingham."

There was a pause after the stock-broker's clerk had concluded his surprising experience. Then Sherlock Holmes cocked his eye at me, leaning back on the cushions with a pleased and yet critical face, like a connoisseur who has just taken his first sip of a comet vintage.

"Rather fine, Watson, is it not?" said he. "There are points in it which please me. I think that you will agree with me that an interview with Mr. Arthur Harry Pinner in the temporary offices of the Franco-Midland Hardware Company, Limited, would be a rather interesting experience for both of us."

"But how can we do it?" I asked.

"Oh, easily enough," said Hall Pycroft, cheerily. "You are two friends of mine who are in want of a billet, and what could be more natural than that I should bring you both round to the managing director?"

"Quite so, of course," said Holmes. "I should like to have a look at the gentleman, and see if I can make anything of his little game. What qualities have you, my friend, which would make your services so valuable? or is it possible that--" He began biting his nails and staring blankly out of the window, and we hardly drew another word from him until we were in New Street.

At seven o'clock that evening we were walking, the three of us, down Corporation Street to the company's offices.

"It is no use our being at all before our time," said our client. "He only comes there to see me, apparently, for the place is deserted up to the very hour he names."

"That is suggestive," remarked Holmes.

"By Jove, I told you so!" cried the clerk. "That's he walking ahead of us there."

He pointed to a smallish, dark, well-dressed man who was bustling along the other side of the road. As we watched him he looked across at a boy who was bawling out the latest edition of the evening paper, and running over among the cabs and busses, he bought one from him. Then, clutching it in his hand, he vanished through a door-way.

"There he goes!" cried Hall Pycroft. "These are the company's offices into which he has gone. Come with me, and I'll fix it up as easily as possible."

Following his lead, we ascended five stories, until we found ourselves outside a half-opened door, at which our client tapped. A voice within bade us enter, and we entered a bare, unfurnished room such as Hall Pycroft had described. At the single table sat the man whom we had seen in the street, with his evening paper spread out in front of him, and as



he looked up at us it seemed to me that I had never looked upon a face which bore such marks of grief, and of something beyond grief--of a horror such as comes to few men in a lifetime. His brow glistened with perspiration, his cheeks were of the dull, dead white of a fish's belly, and his eyes were wild and staring. He looked at his clerk as though he failed to recognize him, and I could see by the astonishment depicted upon our conductor's face that this was by no means the usual appearance of his employer.

"You look ill, Mr. Pinner!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, I am not very well," answered the other, making obvious efforts to pull himself together, and licking his dry lips before he spoke. "Who are these gentlemen whom you have brought with you?"

"One is Mr. Harris, of Bermondsey, and the other is Mr. Price, of this town," said our clerk, glibly. "They are friends of mine and gentlemen of experience, but they have been out of a place for some little time, and they hoped that perhaps you might find an opening for them in the company's employment."

"Very possibly! Very possibly!" cried Mr. Pinner with a ghastly smile. "Yes, I have no doubt that we shall be able to do something for you. What is your particular line, Mr. Harris?"

"I am an accountant," said Holmes.

"Ah yes, we shall want something of the sort. And you, Mr. Price?"

"A clerk," said I.

"I have every hope that the company may accommodate you. I will let you know about it as soon as we come to any conclusion. And now I beg that you will go. For God's sake leave me to myself!"

These last words were shot out of him, as though the constraint which he was evidently setting upon himself had suddenly and utterly burst asunder. Holmes and I glanced at each other, and Hall Pycroft took a step towards the table.

"You forget, Mr. Pinner, that I am here by appointment to receive some directions from you," said he.

"Certainly, Mr. Pycroft, certainly," the other resumed in a calmer tone. "You may wait here a moment; and there is no reason why your friends should not wait with you. I will be entirely at your service in three minutes, if I might trespass upon your patience so far." He rose with a very courteous air, and, bowing to us, he passed out through a door at the farther end of the room, which he closed behind him.

"What now?" whispered Holmes. "Is he giving us the slip?"

"Impossible," answered Pycroft.

"Why so?"

"That door leads into an inner room."

"There is no exit?"

"None."

"Is it furnished?"

"It was empty yesterday."

"Then what on earth can he be doing? There is something which I don't understand in this manner. If ever a man was three parts mad with terror, that man's name is Pinner. What can have put the shivers on him?"

"He suspects that we are detectives," I suggested.

"That's it," cried Pycroft.

Holmes shook his head. "He did not turn pale. He was pale when we entered the room," said he. "It is just possible that--"

His words were interrupted by a sharp rat-tat from the direction of the inner door.

"What the deuce is he knocking at his own door for?" cried the clerk.

Again and much louder came the rat-tat-tat. We all gazed expectantly at the closed door. Glancing at Holmes, I saw his face turn rigid, and he leaned forward in intense excitement. Then suddenly came a low gurgling, gargling sound, and a brisk drumming upon woodwork. Holmes sprang frantically across the room and pushed at the door. It was fastened on the inner side. Following his example, we threw ourselves upon it with all our weight. One hinge snapped, then the other, and down came the door with a crash. Rushing over it, we found ourselves in the inner room. It was empty.

But it was only for a moment that we were at fault. At one corner, the corner nearest the room which we had left, there was a second door. Holmes sprang to it and pulled it open. A coat and waistcoat were lying on the floor, and from a hook behind the door, with his own braces round his neck, was hanging the managing director of the Franco-Midland Hardware Company. His knees were drawn up, his head hung at a dreadful angle to his body, and the clatter of his heels against the door made the noise which had broken in upon our conversation. In an instant I had caught him round the waist, and held him up while Holmes and Pycroft

untied the elastic bands which had disappeared between the livid creases of skin. Then we carried him into the other room, where he lay with a clay-colored face, puffing his purple lips in and out with every breath--a dreadful wreck of all that he had been but five minutes before.

"What do you think of him, Watson?" asked Holmes.

I stooped over him and examined him. His pulse was feeble and intermittent, but his breathing grew longer, and there was a little shivering of his eyelids, which showed a thin white slit of ball beneath.

"It has been touch and go with him," said I, "but he'll live now. Just open that window, and hand me the water carafe." I undid his collar, poured the cold water over his face, and raised and sank his arms until he drew a long, natural breath. "It's only a question of time now," said I, as I turned away from him.

Holmes stood by the table, with his hands deep in his trouser's pockets and his chin upon his breast.

"I suppose we ought to call the police in now," said he. "And yet I confess that I'd like to give them a complete case when they come."

"It's a blessed mystery to me," cried Pycroft, scratching his head. "Whatever they wanted to bring me all the way up here for, and then--"

"Pooh! All that is clear enough," said Holmes impatiently. "It is this last sudden move."

"You understand the rest, then?"

"I think that it is fairly obvious. What do you say, Watson?"

I shrugged my shoulders. "I must confess that I am out of my depths," said I.

"Oh surely if you consider the events at first they can only point to one conclusion."

"What do you make of them?"

"Well, the whole thing hinges upon two points. The first is the making of Pycroft write a declaration by which he entered the service of this preposterous company. Do you not see how very suggestive that is?"

"I am afraid I miss the point."

"Well, why did they want him to do it? Not as a business matter, for these arrangements are usually verbal, and there was no earthly business

reason why this should be an exception. Don't you see, my young friend, that they were very anxious to obtain a specimen of your handwriting, and had no other way of doing it?"

"And why?"

"Quite so. Why? When we answer that we have made some progress with our little problem. Why? There can be only one adequate reason. Some one wanted to learn to imitate your writing, and had to procure a specimen of it first. And now if we pass on to the second point we find that each throws light upon the other. That point is the request made by Pinner that you should not resign your place, but should leave the manager of this important business in the full expectation that a Mr. Hall Pycroft, whom he had never seen, was about to enter the office upon the Monday morning."

"My God!" cried our client, "what a blind beetle I have been!"

"Now you see the point about the handwriting. Suppose that some one turned up in your place who wrote a completely different hand from that in which you had applied for the vacancy, of course the game would have been up. But in the interval the rogue had learned to imitate you, and his position was therefore secure, as I presume that nobody in the office had ever set eyes upon you."

"Not a soul," groaned Hall Pycroft.

"Very good. Of course it was of the utmost importance to prevent you from thinking better of it, and also to keep you from coming into contact with any one who might tell you that your double was at work in Mawson's office. Therefore they gave you a handsome advance on your salary, and ran you off to the Midlands, where they gave you enough work to do to prevent your going to London, where you might have burst their little game up. That is all plain enough."

"But why should this man pretend to be his own brother?"

"Well, that is pretty clear also. There are evidently only two of them in it. The other is impersonating you at the office. This one acted as your engager, and then found that he could not find you an employer without admitting a third person into his plot. That he was most unwilling to do. He changed his appearance as far as he could, and trusted that the likeness, which you could not fail to observe, would be put down to a family resemblance. But for the happy chance of the gold stuffing, your suspicions would probably never have been aroused."

Hall Pycroft shook his clinched hands in the air. "Good Lord!" he cried, "while I have been fooled in this way, what has this other Hall Pycroft been doing at Mawson's? What should we do, Mr. Holmes? Tell me what to do."

"We must wire to Mawson's."

"They shut at twelve on Saturdays."

"Never mind. There may be some door-keeper or attendant--"

"Ah yes, they keep a permanent guard there on account of the value of the securities that they hold. I remember hearing it talked of in the City."

"Very good; we shall wire to him, and see if all is well, and if a clerk of your name is working there. That is clear enough; but what is not so clear is why at sight of us one of the rogues should instantly walk out of the room and hang himself."

"The paper!" croaked a voice behind us. The man was sitting up, blanched and ghastly, with returning reason in his eyes, and hands which rubbed nervously at the broad red band which still encircled his throat.

"The paper! Of course!" yelled Holmes, in a paroxysm of excitement. "Idiot that I was! I thought so much of our visit that the paper never entered my head for an instant. To be sure, the secret must be there." He flattened it out upon the table, and a cry of triumph burst from his lips. "Look at this, Watson," he cried. "It is a London paper, an early edition of the Evening Standard. Here is what we want. Look at the headlines: 'Crime in the City. Murder at Mawson & Williams's. Gigantic attempted Robbery. Capture of the Criminal.' Here, Watson, we are all equally anxious to hear it, so kindly read it aloud to us."

It appeared from its position in the paper to have been the one event of importance in town, and the account of it ran in this way:

"A desperate attempt at robbery, culminating in the death of one man and the capture of the criminal, occurred this afternoon in the City. For some time back Mawson & Williams, the famous financial house, have been the guardians of securities which amount in the aggregate to a sum of considerably over a million sterling. So conscious was the manager of the responsibility which devolved upon him in consequence of the great interests at stake that safes of the very latest construction have been employed, and an armed watchman has been left day and night in the building. It appears that last week a new clerk named Hall Pycroft was engaged by the firm. This person appears to have been none other than Beddington, the famous forger and cracksman, who, with his brother, had only recently emerged from a five years' spell of penal servitude. By some means, which are not yet clear, he succeeded in winning, under a false name, this official position in the office, which he utilized in order to obtain moulding of various locks, and a thorough knowledge of the position of the strong room and the safes.

"It is customary at Mawson's for the clerks to leave at midday on Saturday. Sergeant Tuson, of the City Police, was somewhat surprised,

therefore to see a gentleman with a carpet bag come down the steps at twenty minutes past one. His suspicions being aroused, the sergeant followed the man, and with the aid of Constable Pollock succeeded, after a most desperate resistance, in arresting him. It was at once clear that a daring and gigantic robbery had been committed. Nearly a hundred thousand pounds' worth of American railway bonds, with a large amount of scrip in mines and other companies, was discovered in the bag. On examining the premises the body of the unfortunate watchman was found doubled up and thrust into the largest of the safes, where it would not have been discovered until Monday morning had it not been for the prompt action of Sergeant Tuson. The man's skull had been shattered by a blow from a poker delivered from behind. There could be no doubt that Beddington had obtained entrance by pretending that he had left something behind him, and having murdered the watchman, rapidly rifled the large safe, and then made off with his booty. His brother, who usually works with him, has not appeared in this job as far as can at present be ascertained, although the police are making energetic inquiries as to his whereabouts."

"Well, we may save the police some little trouble in that direction," said Holmes, glancing at the haggard figure huddled up by the window. "Human nature is a strange mixture, Watson. You see that even a villain and murderer can inspire such affection that his brother turns to suicide when he learns that his neck is forfeited. However, we have no choice as to our action. The doctor and I will remain on guard, Mr. Pycroft, if you will have the kindness to step out for the police."



## MELISANDE: OR LONG AND SHORT DIVISION

The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Nine Unlikely Tales*, by E. Nesbit

WHEN the Princess Melisande was born, her mother, the Queen, wished to have a christening party, but the King put his foot down and said he would not have it.

"I've seen too much trouble come of christening parties," said he. "However carefully you keep your visiting-book, some fairy or other is sure to get left out, and you know what \_that\_ leads to. Why, even in my own family, the most shocking things have occurred. The Fairy Malevola was not asked to my great-grandmother's christening—and you know all about the spindle and the hundred years' sleep."

"Perhaps you're right," said the Queen. "My own cousin by marriage forgot some stuffy old fairy or other when she was sending out the

cards for her daughter's christening, and the old wretch turned up at the last moment, and the girl drops toads out of her mouth to this day."

"Just so. And then there was that business of the mouse and the kitchen-maids," said the King; "we'll have no nonsense about it. I'll be her godfather, and you shall be her godmother, and we won't ask a single fairy; then none of them can be offended."

"Unless they all are," said the Queen.

And that was exactly what happened. When the King and the Queen and the baby got back from the christening the parlourmaid met them at the door, and said—

"Please, your Majesty, several ladies have called. I told them you were not at home, but they all said they'd wait."

"Are they in the parlour?" asked the Queen.

"I've shown them into the Throne Room, your Majesty," said the parlourmaid. "You see, there are several of them."

There were about seven hundred. The great Throne Room was crammed with fairies, of all ages and of all degrees of beauty and ugliness—good fairies and bad fairies, flower fairies and moon fairies, fairies like spiders and fairies like butterflies—and as the Queen opened the door and began to say how sorry she was to have kept them waiting, they all cried, with one voice, "Why didn't you ask me to your christening party?"

"I haven't had a party," said the Queen, and she turned to the King and whispered, "I told you so." This was her only consolation.

"You've had a christening," said the fairies, all together.

"I'm very sorry," said the poor Queen, but Malevola pushed forward and said, "Hold your tongue," most rudely.

Malevola is the oldest, as well as the most wicked, of the fairies. She is deservedly unpopular, and has been left out of more christening parties than all the rest of the fairies put together.

"Don't begin to make excuses," she said, shaking her finger at the Queen. "That only makes your conduct worse. You know well enough what happens if a fairy is left out of a christening party. We are all going to give our christening presents now. As the fairy of highest social position, I shall begin. The Princess shall be bald."

The Queen nearly fainted as Malevola drew back, and another fairy, in a smart bonnet with snakes in it, stepped forward with a rustle of bats' wings. But the King stepped forward too.

“No you don’t!” said he. “I wonder at you, ladies, I do indeed. How can you be so unfairylike? Have none of you been to school—have none of you studied the history of your own race? Surely you don’t need a poor, ignorant King like me to tell you that this is \_no go\_?”

“How dare you?” cried the fairy in the bonnet, and the snakes in it quivered as she tossed her head. “It is my turn, and I say the Princess shall be——”

The King actually put his hand over her mouth.

“Look here,” he said; “I won’t have it. Listen to reason—or you’ll be sorry afterwards. A fairy who breaks the traditions of fairy history goes out—you know she does—like the flame of a candle. And all tradition shows that only \_one\_ bad fairy is ever forgotten at a christening party and the good ones are always invited; so either this is not a christening party, or else you were all invited except one, and, by her own showing, that was Malevola. It nearly always is. Do I make myself clear?”

Several of the better-class fairies who had been led away by Malevola’s influence murmured that there was something in what His Majesty said.

“Try it, if you don’t believe me,” said the King; “give your nasty gifts to my innocent child—but as sure as you do, out you go, like a candle-flame. Now, then, will you risk it?”

No one answered, and presently several fairies came up to the Queen and said what a pleasant party it had been, but they really must be going. This example decided the rest. One by one all the fairies said goodbye and thanked the Queen for the delightful afternoon they had spent with her.

“It’s been quite too lovely,” said the lady with the snake-bonnet; “\_do\_ ask us again soon, dear Queen. I shall be so \_longing\_ to see you again, and the \_dear\_ baby,” and off she went, with the snake-trimming quivering more than ever.

When the very last fairy was gone the Queen ran to look at the baby—she tore off its Honiton lace cap and burst into tears. For all the baby’s downy golden hair came off with the cap, and the Princess Melisande was as bald as an egg.

“Don’t cry, my love,” said the King. “I have a wish lying by, which I’ve never had occasion to use. My fairy godmother gave it me for a wedding present, but since then I’ve had nothing to wish for!”

“Thank you, dear,” said the Queen, smiling through her tears.

“I’ll keep the wish till baby grows up,” the King went on. “And then



I'll give it to her, and if she likes to wish for hair she can."

"Oh, won't you wish for it now?" said the Queen, dropping mixed tears and kisses on the baby's round, smooth head.

"No, dearest. She may want something else more when she grows up. And besides, her hair may grow by itself."

But it never did. Princess Melisande grew up as beautiful as the sun and as good as gold, but never a hair grew on that little head of hers. The Queen sewed her little caps of green silk, and the Princess's pink and white face looked out of these like a flower peeping out of its bud. And every day as she grew older she grew dearer, and as she grew dearer she grew better, and as she grew more good she grew more beautiful.

Now, when she was grown up the Queen said to the King—

"My love, our dear daughter is old enough to know what she wants. Let her have the wish."

So the King wrote to his fairy godmother and sent the letter by a butterfly. He asked if he might hand on to his daughter the wish the fairy had given him for a wedding present.

"I have never had occasion to use it," said he, "though it has always made me happy to remember that I had such a thing in the house. The wish is as good as new, and my daughter is now of an age to appreciate so valuable a present."

To which the fairy replied by return of butterfly:—

"DEAR KING,—Pray do whatever you like with my poor little present. I had quite forgotten it, but I am pleased to think that you have treasured my humble keepsake all these years.

"Your affectionate godmother,  
"FORTUNA F."

So the King unlocked his gold safe with the seven diamond-handled keys that hung at his girdle, and took out the wish and gave it to his daughter.

And Melisande said: "Father, I will wish that all your subjects should be quite happy."

But they were that already, because the King and Queen were so good. So the wish did not go off.

So then she said: "Then I wish them all to be good."

But they were that already, because they were happy. So again the wish hung fire.

Then the Queen said: "Dearest, for my sake, wish what I tell you."

"Why, of course I will," said Melisande. The Queen whispered in her ear, and Melisande nodded. Then she said, aloud—

"I wish I had golden hair a yard long, and that it would grow an inch every day, and grow twice as fast every time it was cut, and——"

"Stop," cried the King. And the wish went off, and the next moment the Princess stood smiling at him through a shower of golden hair.

"Oh, how lovely," said the Queen. "What a pity you interrupted her, dear; she hadn't finished."

"What was the end?" asked the King.

"Oh," said Melisande, "I was only going to say, 'and twice as thick.'"

"It's a very good thing you didn't," said the King. "You've done about enough." For he had a mathematical mind, and could do the sums about the grains of wheat on the chess-board, and the nails in the horse's shoes, in his Royal head without any trouble at all.

"Why, what's the matter?" asked the Queen.

"You'll know soon enough," said the King. "Come, let's be happy while we may. Give me a kiss, little Melisande, and then go to nurse and ask her to teach you how to comb your hair."

"I know," said Melisande, "I've often combed mother's."

"Your mother has beautiful hair," said the King; "but I fancy you will find your own less easy to manage."

And, indeed, it was so. The Princess's hair began by being a yard long, and it grew an inch every night. If you know anything at all about the simplest sums you will see that in about five weeks her hair was about two yards long. This is a very inconvenient length. It trails on the floor and sweeps up all the dust, and though in palaces, of course, it is all gold-dust, still it is not nice to have it in your hair. And the Princess's hair was growing an inch every night. When it was three yards long the Princess could not bear it any longer—it was so heavy and so hot—so she borrowed nurse's cutting-out scissors and cut it all off, and then for a few hours she was comfortable. But the hair went on growing, and now it grew twice as fast as before; so that in thirty-six days it was as long as ever. The poor Princess cried with tiredness; when she couldn't bear it any more she cut her hair and was comfortable

for a very little time. For the hair now grew four times as fast as at first, and in eighteen days it was as long as before, and she had to have it cut. Then it grew eight inches a day, and the next time it was cut it grew sixteen inches a day, and then thirty-two inches and sixty-four inches and a hundred and twenty-eight inches a day, and so on, growing twice as fast after each cutting, till the Princess would go to bed at night with her hair clipped short, and wake up in the morning with yards and yards and yards of golden hair flowing all about the room, so that she could not move without pulling her own hair, and nurse had to come and cut the hair off before she could get out of bed.

“I wish I was bald again,” sighed poor Melisande, looking at the little green caps she used to wear, and she cried herself to sleep o’ nights between the golden billows of the golden hair. But she never let her mother see her cry, because it was the Queen’s fault, and Melisande did not want to seem to reproach her.

When first the Princess’s hair grew her mother sent locks of it to all her Royal relations, who had them set in rings and brooches. Later, the Queen was able to send enough for bracelets and girdles. But presently so much hair was cut off that they had to burn it. Then when autumn came all the crops failed; it seemed as though all the gold of harvest had gone into the Princess’s hair. And there was a famine. Then Melisande said—

“It seems a pity to waste all my hair; it does grow so very fast. Couldn’t we stuff things with it, or something, and sell them, to feed the people?”

So the King called a council of merchants, and they sent out samples of the Princess’s hair, and soon orders came pouring in; and the Princess’s hair became the staple export of that country. They stuffed pillows with it, and they stuffed beds with it. They made ropes of it for sailors to use, and curtains for hanging in Kings’ palaces. They made haircloth of it, for hermits, and other people who wished to be uncomfy. But it was so soft and silky that it only made them happy and warm, which they did not wish to be. So the hermits gave up wearing it, and, instead, mothers bought it for their little babies, and all well-born infants wore little shirts of Princess-haircloth.

And still the hair grew and grew. And the people were fed and the famine came to an end.

Then the King said: “It was all very well while the famine lasted—but now I shall write to my fairy godmother and see if something cannot be done.”

So he wrote and sent the letter by a skylark, and by return of bird came this answer—

“Why not advertise for a competent Prince? Offer the usual reward.”

So the King sent out his heralds all over the world to proclaim that any respectable Prince with proper references should marry the Princess Melisande if he could stop her hair growing.

Then from far and near came trains of Princes anxious to try their luck, and they brought all sorts of nasty things with them in bottles and round wooden boxes. The Princess tried all the remedies, but she did not like any of them, and she did not like any of the Princes, so in her heart she was rather glad that none of the nasty things in bottles and boxes made the least difference to her hair.

[Illustration: TRAINS OF PRINCES BRINGING NASTY THINGS IN BOTTLES AND ROUND WOODEN BOXES.]

The Princess had to sleep in the great Throne Room now, because no other room was big enough to hold her and her hair. When she woke in the morning the long high room would be quite full of her golden hair, packed tight and thick like wool in a barn. And every night when she had had the hair cut close to her head she would sit in her green silk gown by the window and cry, and kiss the little green caps she used to wear, and wish herself bald again.

It was as she sat crying there on Midsummer Eve that she first saw Prince Florizel.

He had come to the palace that evening, but he would not appear in her presence with the dust of travel on him, and she had retired with her hair borne by twenty pages before he had bathed and changed his garments and entered the reception-room.

Now he was walking in the garden in the moonlight, and he looked up and she looked down, and for the first time Melisande, looking on a Prince, wished that he might have the power to stop her hair from growing. As for the Prince, he wished many things, and the first was granted him. For he said—

“You are Melisande?”

“And you are Florizel?”

“There are many roses round your window,” said he to her, “and none down here.”

She threw him one of three white roses she held in her hand. Then he said—

“White rose trees are strong. May I climb up to you?”

“Surely,” said the Princess.

So he climbed up to the window.

“Now,” said he, “if I can do what your father asks, will you marry me?”

“My father has promised that I shall,” said Melisande, playing with the white roses in her hand.

“Dear Princess,” said he, “your father’s promise is nothing to me. I want yours. Will you give it to me?”

“Yes,” said she, and gave him the second rose.

“I want your hand.”

“Yes,” she said.

“And your heart with it.”

“Yes,” said the Princess, and she gave him the third rose.

“And a kiss to seal the promise.”

“Yes,” said she.

“And a kiss to go with the hand.”

“Yes,” she said.

“And a kiss to bring the heart.”

“Yes,” said the Princess, and she gave him the three kisses.

“Now,” said he, when he had given them back to her, “to-night do not go to bed. Stay by your window, and I will stay down here in the garden and watch. And when your hair has grown to the filling of your room call to me, and then do as I tell you.”

“I will,” said the Princess.

So at dewy sunrise the Prince, lying on the turf beside the sun-dial, heard her voice—

“Florizel! Florizel! My hair has grown so long that it is pushing me out of the window.”

“Get out on to the window-sill,” said he, “and twist your hair three times round the great iron hook that is there.”

And she did.

Then the Prince climbed up the rose bush with his naked sword in his

teeth, and he took the Princess's hair in his hand about a yard from her head and said—

“Jump!”

The Princess jumped, and screamed, for there she was hanging from the hook by a yard and a half of her bright hair; the Prince tightened his grasp of the hair and drew his sword across it.

Then he let her down gently by her hair till her feet were on the grass, and jumped down after her.

They stayed talking in the garden till all the shadows had crept under their proper trees and the sun-dial said it was breakfast time.

Then they went in to breakfast, and all the Court crowded round to wonder and admire. For the Princess's hair had not grown.

“How did you do it?” asked the King, shaking Florizel warmly by the hand.

“The simplest thing in the world,” said Florizel, modestly. “You have always cut the hair off the Princess. I just cut the Princess off the hair.”

“Humph!” said the King, who had a logical mind. And during breakfast he more than once looked anxiously at his daughter. When they got up from breakfast the Princess rose with the rest, but she rose and rose and rose, till it seemed as though there would never be an end of it. The Princess was nine feet high.

“I feared as much,” said the King, sadly. “I wonder what will be the rate of progression. You see,” he said to poor Florizel, “when we cut the hair off it grows—when we cut the Princess off she grows. I wish you had happened to think of that!”

The Princess went on growing. By dinner-time she was so large that she had to have her dinner brought out into the garden because she was too large to get indoors. But she was too unhappy to be able to eat anything. And she cried so much that there was quite a pool in the garden, and several pages were nearly drowned. So she remembered her “Alice in Wonderland,” and stopped crying at once. But she did not stop growing. She grew bigger and bigger and bigger, till she had to go outside the palace gardens and sit on the common, and even that was too small to hold her comfortably, for every hour she grew twice as much as she had done the hour before. And nobody knew what to do, nor where the Princess was to sleep. Fortunately, her clothes had grown with her, or she would have been very cold indeed, and now she sat on the common in her green gown, embroidered with gold, looking like a great hill covered with gorse in flower.

You cannot possibly imagine how large the Princess was growing, and her mother stood wringing her hands on the castle tower, and the Prince Florizel looked on broken-hearted to see his Princess snatched from his arms and turned into a lady as big as a mountain.

The King did not weep or look on. He sat down at once and wrote to his fairy godmother, asking her advice. He sent a weasel with the letter, and by return of weasel he got his own letter back again, marked “Gone away. Left no address.”

It was now, when the kingdom was plunged into gloom, that a neighbouring King took it into his head to send an invading army against the island where Melisande lived. They came in ships and they landed in great numbers, and Melisande looking down from her height saw alien soldiers marching on the sacred soil of her country.

“I don’t mind so much now,” said she, “if I can really be of some use this size.”

And she picked up the army of the enemy in handfuls and double-handfuls, and put them back into their ships, and gave a little flip to each transport ship with her finger and thumb, which sent the ships off so fast that they never stopped till they reached their own country, and when they arrived there the whole army to a man said it would rather be courtmartialled a hundred times over than go near the place again.

[Illustration: THE PRINCESS GREW SO BIG THAT SHE HAD TO GO AND SIT ON THE COMMON.]

Meantime Melisande, sitting on the highest hill on the island, felt the land trembling and shivering under her giant feet.

“I do believe I’m getting too heavy,” she said, and jumped off the island into the sea, which was just up to her ankles. Just then a great fleet of warships and gunboats and torpedo boats came in sight, on their way to attack the island.

Melisande could easily have sunk them all with one kick, but she did not like to do this because it might have drowned the sailors, and besides, it might have swamped the island.

So she simply stooped and picked the island as you would pick a mushroom—for, of course, all islands are supported by a stalk underneath—and carried it away to another part of the world. So that when the warships got to where the island was marked on the map they found nothing but sea, and a very rough sea it was, because the Princess had churned it all up with her ankles as she walked away through it with the island.

When Melisande reached a suitable place, very sunny and warm, and with

no sharks in the water, she set down the island; and the people made it fast with anchors, and then every one went to bed, thanking the kind fate which had sent them so great a Princess to help them in their need, and calling her the saviour of her country and the bulwark of the nation.

But it is poor work being the nation's bulwark and your country's saviour when you are miles high, and have no one to talk to, and when all you want is to be your humble right size again and to marry your sweetheart. And when it was dark the Princess came close to the island, and looked down, from far up, at her palace and her tower and cried, and cried, and cried. It does not matter how much you cry into the sea, it hardly makes any difference, however large you may be. Then when everything was quite dark the Princess looked up at the stars.

"I wonder how soon I shall be big enough to knock my head against them," said she.

And as she stood star-gazing she heard a whisper right in her ear. A very little whisper, but quite plain.

"Cut off your hair!" it said.

Now, everything the Princess was wearing had grown big along with her, so that now there dangled from her golden girdle a pair of scissors as big as the Malay Peninsula, together with a pin-cushion the size of the Isle of Wight, and a yard measure that would have gone round Australia.

And when she heard the little, little voice, she knew it, small as it was, for the dear voice of Prince Florizel, and she whipped out the scissors from her gold case and snip, snip, snipped all her hair off, and it fell into the sea. The coral insects got hold of it at once and set to work on it, and now they have made it into the biggest coral reef in the world; but that has nothing to do with the story.

Then the voice said, "Get close to the island," and the Princess did, but she could not get very close because she was so large, and she looked up again at the stars and they seemed to be much farther off.

Then the voice said, "Be ready to swim," and she felt something climb out of her ear and clamber down her arm. The stars got farther and farther away, and next moment the Princess found herself swimming in the sea, and Prince Florizel swimming beside her.

"I crept on to your hand when you were carrying the island," he explained, when their feet touched the sand and they walked in through the shallow water, "and I got into your ear with an ear-trumpet. You never noticed me because you were so great then."

"Oh, my dear Prince," cried Melisande, falling into his arms, "you have saved me. I am my proper size again."



So they went home and told the King and Queen. Both were very, very happy, but the King rubbed his chin with his hand, and said—

“You’ve certainly had some fun for your money, young man, but don’t you see that we’re just where we were before? Why, the child’s hair is growing already.”

And indeed it was.

Then once more the King sent a letter to his godmother. He sent it by a flying-fish, and by return of fish come the answer—

“Just back from my holidays. Sorry for your troubles. Why not try scales?”

And on this message the whole Court pondered for weeks.

But the Prince caused a pair of gold scales to be made, and hung them up in the palace gardens under a big oak tree. And one morning he said to the Princess—

“My darling Melisande, I must really speak seriously to you. We are getting on in life. I am nearly twenty: it is time that we thought of being settled. Will you trust me entirely and get into one of those gold scales?”

So he took her down into the garden, and helped her into the scale, and she curled up in it in her green and gold gown, like a little grass mound with buttercups on it.

“And what is going into the other scale?” asked Melisande.

“Your hair,” said Florizel. “You see, when your hair is cut off you it grows, and when you are cut off your hair you grow—oh, my heart’s delight, I can never forget how you grew, never! But if, when your hair is no more than you, and you are no more than your hair, I snip the scissors between you and it, then neither you nor your hair can possibly decide which ought to go on growing.”

“Suppose both did,” said the poor Princess, humbly.

“Impossible,” said the Prince, with a shudder; “there are limits even to Malevola’s malevolence. And, besides, Fortuna said ‘Scales.’ Will you try it?”

“I will do whatever you wish,” said the poor Princess, “but let me kiss my father and mother once, and Nurse, and you, too, my dear, in case I grow large again and can kiss nobody any more.”

So they came one by one and kissed the Princess.

Then the nurse cut off the Princess's hair, and at once it began to grow at a frightful rate.

The King and Queen and nurse busily packed it, as it grew, into the other scale, and gradually the scale went down a little. The Prince stood waiting between the scales with his drawn sword, and just before the two were equal he struck. But during the time his sword took to flash through the air the Princess's hair grew a yard or two, so that at the instant when he struck the balance was true.

"You are a young man of sound judgment," said the King, embracing him, while the Queen and the nurse ran to help the Princess out of the gold scale.

The scale full of golden hair bumped down on to the ground as the Princess stepped out of the other one, and stood there before those who loved her, laughing and crying with happiness, because she remained her proper size, and her hair was not growing any more.

She kissed her Prince a hundred times, and the very next day they were married. Every one remarked on the beauty of the bride, and it was noticed that her hair was quite short—only five feet five and a quarter inches long—just down to her pretty ankles. Because the scales had been ten feet ten and a half inches apart, and the Prince, having a straight eye, had cut the golden hair exactly in the middle!



## THE SNOWSTORM

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Towards the end of the year 1811, a memorable period for us, the good Gavril Gavrilovitch R----- was living on his domain of Nenaradova. He was celebrated throughout the district for his hospitality and kind-heartedness. The neighbours were constantly visiting him: some to eat and drink; some to play at five copeck "Boston" with his wife, Praskovia Petrovna; and some to look at their daughter, Maria Gavrilovna, a pale, slender girl of seventeen. She was considered a wealthy match, and many desired her for themselves or for their sons.

Maria Gavrilovna had been brought up on French novels, and consequently was in love. The object of her choice was a poor sub-lieutenant in the army, who was then on leave of absence in his village. It need scarcely

be mentioned that the young man returned her passion with equal ardour, and that the parents of his beloved one, observing their mutual inclination, forbade their daughter to think of him, and received him worse than a discharged assessor.

Our lovers corresponded with one another and daily saw each other alone in the little pine wood or near the old chapel. There they exchanged vows of eternal love, lamented their cruel fate, and formed various plans. Corresponding and conversing in this way, they arrived quite naturally at the following conclusion:

If we cannot exist without each other, and the will of hard-hearted parents stands in the way of our happiness, why cannot we do without them?

Needless to mention that this happy idea originated in the mind of the young man, and that it was very congenial to the romantic imagination of Maria Gavrilovna.

The winter came and put a stop to their meetings, but their correspondence became all the more active. Vladimir Nikolaievitch in every letter implored her to give herself up to him, to get married secretly, to hide for some time, and then throw themselves at the feet of their parents, who would, without any doubt, be touched at last by the heroic constancy and unhappiness of the lovers, and would infallibly say to them: "Children, come to our arms!"

Maria Gavrilovna hesitated for a long time, and several plans for a flight were rejected. At last she consented: on the appointed day she was not to take supper, but was to retire to her room under the pretext of a headache. Her maid was in the plot; they were both to go into the garden by the back stairs, and behind the garden they would find ready a sledge, into which they were to get, and then drive straight to the church of Jadrino, a village about five versts from Nenaradova, where Vladimir would be waiting for them.

On the eve of the decisive day, Maria Gavrilovna did not sleep the whole night; she packed and tied up her linen and other articles of apparel, wrote a long letter to a sentimental young lady, a friend of hers, and another to her parents. She took leave of them in the most touching terms, urged the invincible strength of passion as an excuse for the step she was taking, and wound up with the assurance that she should consider it the happiest moment of her life, when she should be allowed to throw herself at the feet of her dear parents.

After having sealed both letters with a Toula seal, upon which were engraved two flaming hearts with a suitable inscription, she threw herself upon her bed just before daybreak, and dozed off: but even then she was constantly being awakened by terrible dreams. First it seemed to her that at the very moment when she seated herself in the sledge, in order to go and get married, her father stopped

her, dragged her over the snow with fearful rapidity, and threw her into a dark bottomless abyss, down which she fell headlong with an indescribable sinking of the heart. Then she saw Vladimir lying on the grass, pale and bloodstained. With his dying breath he implored her in a piercing voice to make haste and marry him.... Other fantastic and senseless visions floated before her one after another. At last she arose, paler than usual, and with an unfeigned headache. Her father and mother observed her uneasiness; their tender solicitude and incessant inquiries: "What is the matter with you, Masha? Are you ill, Masha?" cut her to the heart. She tried to reassure them and to appear cheerful, but in vain.

The evening came. The thought, that this was the last day she would pass in the bosom of her family, weighed upon her heart. She was more dead than alive. In secret she took leave of everybody, of all the objects that surrounded her.

Supper was served; her heart began to beat violently. In a trembling voice she declared that she did not want any supper, and then took leave of her father and mother. They kissed her and blessed her as usual, and she could hardly restrain herself from weeping.

On reaching her own room, she threw herself into a chair and burst into tears. Her maid urged her to be calm and to take courage. Everything was ready. In half an hour Masha would leave for ever her parents' house, her room, and her peaceful girlish life....

Out in the courtyard the snow was falling heavily; the wind howled, the shutters shook and rattled, and everything seemed to her to portend misfortune.

Soon all was quiet in the house: everyone was asleep. Masha wrapped herself in a shawl, put on a warm cloak, took her small box in her hand, and went down the back staircase. Her maid followed her with two bundles. They descended into the garden. The snowstorm had not subsided; the wind blew in their faces, as if trying to stop the young criminal. With difficulty they reached the end of the garden. In the road a sledge awaited them. The horses, half-frozen with the cold, would not keep still; Vladimir's coachman was walking up and down in front of them, trying to restrain their impatience. He helped the young lady and her maid into the sledge, placed the box and the bundles in the vehicle, seized the reins, and the horses dashed off.

Having intrusted the young lady to the care of fate and to the skill of Tereshka the coachman, we will return to our young lover.

Vladimir had spent the whole of the day in driving about. In the morning he paid a visit to the priest of Jadrino, and having come to an agreement with him after a great deal of difficulty, he then set out to seek for witnesses among the neighbouring landowners. The first to whom he presented himself, a retired cornet of about forty years of age,

and whose name was Dravin, consented with pleasure. The adventure, he declared, reminded him of his young days and his pranks in the Hussars. He persuaded Vladimir to stay to dinner with him, and assured him that he would have no difficulty in finding the other two witnesses. And, indeed, immediately after dinner, appeared the surveyor Schmidt, with moustache and spurs, and the son of the captain of police, a lad of sixteen years of age, who had recently entered the Uhlans. They not only accepted Vladimir's proposal, but even vowed that they were ready to sacrifice their lives for him. Vladimir embraced them with rapture, and returned home to get everything ready.

It had been dark for some time. He dispatched his faithful Tereshka to Nenaradova with his sledge and with detailed instructions, and ordered for himself the small sledge with one horse, and set out alone, without any coachman, for Jadrino, where Maria Gavrilovna ought to arrive in about a couple of hours. He knew the road well, and the journey would only occupy about twenty minutes altogether.

But scarcely had Vladimir issued from the paddock into the open field, when the wind rose and such a snowstorm came on that he could see nothing. In one minute the road was completely hidden; all surrounding objects disappeared in a thick yellow fog, through which fell the white flakes of snow; earth and sky became confounded. Vladimir found himself in the middle of the field, and tried in vain to find the road again. His horse went on at random, and at every moment; kept either stepping into a snowdrift or stumbling into a hole, so that the sledge was constantly being overturned.. Vladimir endeavoured not to lose the right direction. But it seemed to him that more than half an hour had already passed, and he had not yet reached the Jadrino wood. Another ten minutes elapsed--still no wood was to be seen. Vladimir drove across a field intersected by deep ditches. The snowstorm did not abate, the sky did not become any clearer. The horse began to grow tired, and the perspiration rolled from him in great drops, in spite of the fact that he was constantly being half-buried in the snow.

At last Vladimir perceived that he was going in the wrong direction. He stopped, began to think, to recollect, and compare, and he felt convinced that he ought to have turned to the right. He turned to the right now. His horse could scarcely move forward. He had now been on the road for more than an hour. Jadrino could not be far off. But on and on he went, and still no end to the field--nothing but snowdrifts and ditches. The sledge was constantly being overturned, and as constantly being set right again. The time was passing: Vladimir began to grow seriously uneasy.

At last something dark appeared in the distance. Vladimir directed his course towards it. On drawing near, he perceived that it was a wood.

"Thank Heaven!" he thought, "I am not far off now."

He drove along by the edge of the wood, hoping by-and-by to fall upon

the well-known road or to pass round the wood: Jadrino was situated just behind it. He soon found the road, and plunged into the darkness of the wood, now denuded of leaves by the winter. The wind could not rage here; the road was smooth; the horse recovered courage, and Vladimir felt reassured.

But he drove on and on, and Jadrino was not to be seen; there was no end to the wood. Vladimir discovered with horror that he had entered an unknown forest. Despair took possession of him. He whipped the horse; the poor animal broke into a trot, but it soon slackened its pace, and in about a quarter of an hour it was scarcely able to drag one leg after the other, in spite of all the exertions of the unfortunate Vladimir.

Gradually the trees began to get sparser, and Vladimir emerged from the forest; but Jadrino was not to be seen. It must now have been about midnight. Tears gushed from his eyes; he drove on at random. Meanwhile the storm had subsided, the clouds dispersed, and before him lay a level plain covered with a white undulating carpet. The night was tolerably clear. He saw, not far off, a little village, consisting of four or five houses. Vladimir drove towards it. At the first cottage he jumped out of the sledge, ran to the window and began to knock. After a few minutes, the wooden shutter was raised, and an old man thrust out his grey beard.

"What do you want?"

"Is Jadrino far from here?"

"Is Jadrino far from here?"

"Yes, yes! Is it far?"

"Not far; about ten versts."

At this reply, Vladimir grasped his hair and stood motionless, like a man condemned to death.

"Where do you come from?" continued the old man. Vladimir had not the courage to answer the question.

"Listen, old man," said he: "can you procure me horses to take me to Jadrino?"

"How should we have such things as horses?" replied the peasant.

"Can I obtain a guide? I will pay him whatever he pleases."

"Wait," said the old man, closing the shutter; "I will send my son out to you; he will guide you."

Vladimir waited. But a minute had scarcely elapsed when he began knocking again. The shutter was raised, and the beard again appeared.

"What do you want?"

"What about your son?"

"He'll be out presently; he is putting on his boots. Are you cold? Come in and warm yourself."

"Thank you; send your son out quickly."

The door creaked: a lad came out with a cudgel and went on in front, at one time pointing out the road, at another searching for it among the drifted snow.

"What is the time?" Vladimir asked him.

"It will soon be daylight," replied the young peasant. Vladimir spoke not another word.

The cocks were crowing, and it was already light when they reached Jadrino. The church was closed. Vladimir paid the guide and drove into the priest's courtyard. His sledge was not there. What news awaited him! But let us return to the worthy proprietors of Nenaradova, and see what is happening there.

Nothing.

The old people awoke and went into the parlour, Gavril Gavrilovitch in a night-cap and flannel doublet, Praskovia; Petrovna in a wadded dressing-gown. The tea-urn was brought in, and Gavril Gavrilovitch sent a servant to ask Maria Gavrilovna how she was and how she had passed the night. The servant returned, saying that the young lady had not slept very well, but that she felt better now, and that she would come down presently into the parlour. And indeed, the door opened and Maria Gavrilovna entered the room and wished her father and mother good morning.

"How is your head, Masha?" asked Gavril Gavrilovitch.

"Better, papa," replied Masha.

"Very likely you inhaled the fumes from the charcoal yesterday," said Praskovia Petrovna.

"Very likely, mamma," replied Masha.

The day passed happily enough, but in the night Masha was taken ill. A doctor was sent for from the town. He arrived in the evening and found the sick girl delirious. A violent fever ensued, and for two weeks the

poor patient hovered on the brink of the grave.

Nobody in the house knew anything about her flight. The letters, written by her the evening before, had been burnt; and her maid, dreading the wrath of her master, had not whispered a word about it to anybody. The priest, the retired cornet, the moustached surveyor, and the little Uhlan were discreet, and not without reason. Tereshka, the coachman, never uttered one word too much about it, even when he was drunk. Thus the secret was kept by more than half-a-dozen conspirators.

But Maria Gavrilovna herself divulged her secret during her delirious ravings. But her words were so disconnected, that her mother, who never left her bedside, could only understand from them that her daughter was deeply in love with Vladimir Nikolaievitch, and that probably love was the cause of her illness. She consulted her husband and some of her neighbours, and at last it was unanimously decided that such was evidently Maria Gavrilovna's fate, that a woman cannot ride away from the man who is destined to be her husband, that poverty is not a crime, that one does not marry wealth, but a man, etc., etc. Moral proverbs are wonderfully useful in those cases where we can invent little in our own justification.

In the meantime the young lady began to recover. Vladimir had not been seen for a long time in the house of Gavril Gavrilovitch. He was afraid of the usual reception. It was resolved to send and announce to him an unexpected piece of good news: the consent of Maria's parents to his marriage with their daughter. But what was the astonishment of the proprietor of Nenaradova, when, in reply to their invitation, they received from him a half-insane letter. He informed them that he would never set foot in their house again, and begged them to forget an unhappy creature whose only hope was in death. A few days afterwards they heard that Vladimir had joined the army again. This was in the year 1812.

For a long time they did not dare to announce this to Masha, who was now convalescent. She never mentioned the name of Vladimir. Some months afterwards, finding his name in the list of those who had distinguished themselves and been severely wounded at Borodino,[1] she fainted away, and it was feared that she would have another attack of fever. But, Heaven be thanked! the fainting fit had no serious consequences.

Another misfortune fell upon her: Gavril Gavrilovitch died, leaving her the heiress to all his property. But the inheritance did not console her; she shared sincerely the grief of poor Praskovia Petrovna, vowing that she would never leave her. They both quitted Nenaradova, the scene of so many sad recollections, and went to live on another estate.

Suitors crowded round the young and wealthy heiress, but she gave not the slightest hope to any of them. Her mother sometimes exhorted her to make a choice; but Maria Gavrilovna shook her head and became pensive.



Vladimir no longer existed: he had died in Moscow on the eve of the entry of the French. His memory seemed to be held sacred by Masha; at least she treasured up everything that could remind her of him: books that he had once read, his drawings, his notes, and verses of poetry that he had copied out for her. The neighbours, hearing of all this, were astonished at her constancy, and awaited with curiosity the hero who should at last triumph over the melancholy fidelity of this virgin Artemisia.

Meanwhile the war had ended gloriously. Our regiments returned from abroad, and the people went out to meet them. The bands played the conquering songs: "Vive Henri-Quatre," Tyrolese waltzes and airs from "Joconde." Officers, who had set out for the war almost mere lads, returned grown men, with martial air, and their breasts decorated with crosses. The soldiers chatted gaily among themselves, constantly mingling French and German words in their speech. Time never to be forgotten! Time of glory and enthusiasm! How throbbed the Russian heart at the word "Fatherland!" How sweet were the tears of meeting! With what unanimity did we unite feelings of national pride with love for the Czar! And for him--what a moment!

The women, the Russian women, were then incomparable. Their usual coldness disappeared. Their enthusiasm was truly intoxicating, when welcoming the conquerors they cried "Hurrah!"

"And threw their caps high in the air!" [2]

What officer of that time does not confess that to the Russian women he was indebted for his best and most precious reward?

At this brilliant period Maria Gavrilovna was living with her mother in the province of ----, and did not see how both capitals celebrated the return of the troops. But in the districts and villages the general enthusiasm was, if possible, even still greater. The appearance of an officer in those places was for him a veritable triumph, and the lover in a plain coat felt very ill at ease in his vicinity.

We have already said that, in spite of her coldness, Maria Gavrilovna was, as before, surrounded by suitors. But all had to retire into the background when the wounded Colonel Bourmin of the Hussars, with the Order of St. George in his button-hole, and with an "interesting pallor," as the young ladies of the neighbourhood observed, appeared at the castle. He was about twenty-six years of age. He had obtained leave of absence to visit his estate, which was contiguous to that of Maria Gavrilovna. Maria bestowed special attention upon him. In his presence her habitual pensiveness disappeared. It cannot be said that she coquetted with him, but a poet, observing her behaviour, would have said:

"Se amor non è che dunque?"

Bourmin was indeed a very charming young man. He possessed that spirit which is eminently pleasing to women: a spirit of decorum and observation, without any pretensions, and yet not without a slight tendency towards careless satire. His behaviour towards Maria Gavrilovna was simple and frank, but whatever she said or did, his soul and eyes followed her. He seemed to be of a quiet and modest disposition, though report said that he had once been a terrible rake; but this did not injure him in the opinion of Maria Gavrilovna, who--like all young ladies in general--excused with pleasure follies that gave indication of boldness and ardour of temperament.

But more than everything else--more than his tenderness, more than his agreeable conversation, more than his interesting pallor, more than his arm in a sling,--the silence of the young Hussar excited her curiosity and imagination. She could not but confess that he pleased her very much; probably he, too, with his perception and experience, had already observed that she made a distinction between him and others; how was it then that she had not yet seen him at her feet or heard his declaration? What restrained him? Was it timidity, inseparable from true love, or pride, or the coquetry of a crafty wooer? It was an enigma to her. After long reflection, she came to the conclusion that timidity alone was the cause of it, and she resolved to encourage him by greater attention and, if circumstances should render it necessary, even by an exhibition of tenderness. She prepared a most unexpected dénouement, and waited with impatience for the moment of the romantic explanation. A secret, of whatever nature it may be, always presses heavily upon the female heart. Her stratagem had the desired success; at least Bourmin fell into such a reverie, and his black eyes rested with such fire upon her, that the decisive moment seemed close at hand. The neighbours spoke about the marriage as if it were a matter already decided upon, and good Praskovia Petrovna rejoiced that her daughter had at last found a lover worthy of her.

On one occasion the old lady was sitting alone in the parlour, amusing herself with a pack of cards, when Bourmin entered the room and immediately inquired for Maria Gavrilovna.

"She is in the garden," replied the old lady: "go out to her, and I will wait here for you."

Bourmin went, and the old lady made the sign of the cross and thought: "Perhaps the business will be settled to-day!"

Bourmin found Maria Gavrilovna near the pond, under a willow-tree with a book in her hands, and in a white dress: a veritable heroine of romance. After the first few questions and observations, Maria Gavrilovna purposely allowed the conversation to drop, thereby increasing their mutual embarrassment, from which there was no possible way of escape except only by a sudden and decisive declaration.

And this is what happened: Bourmin, feeling the difficulty of his

position, declared that he had long sought for an opportunity to open his heart to her, and requested a moment's attention. Maria Gavrilovna closed her book and cast down her eyes, as a sign of compliance with his request.

"I love you," said Bourmin: "I love you passionately...."

Maria Gavrilovna blushed and lowered her head still more. "I have acted imprudently in accustoming myself to the sweet pleasure of seeing and hearing you daily...." Maria Gavrilovna recalled to mind the first letter of St. Preux.[3] "But it is now too late to resist my fate; the remembrance of you, your dear incomparable image, will henceforth be the torment and the consolation of my life, but there still remains a grave duty for me to perform--to reveal to you a terrible secret which will place between us an insurmountable barrier...."

"That barrier has always existed," interrupted Maria Gavrilovna hastily: "I could never be your wife."

"I know," replied he calmly: "I know that you once loved, but death and three years of mourning.... Dear, kind Maria Gavrilovna, do not try to deprive me of my last consolation: the thought that you would have consented to make me happy, if----"

"Don't speak, for Heaven's sake, don't speak. You torture me."

"Yes, I know, I feel that you would have been mine, but--I am the most miserable creature under the sun--I am already married!"

Maria Gavrilovna looked at him in astonishment.

"I am already married," continued Bourmin: "I have been married four years, and I do not know who is my wife, or where she is, or whether I shall ever see her again!"

"What do you say?" exclaimed Maria Gavrilovna. "How very strange! Continue: I will relate to you afterwards.... But continue, I beg of you."

"At the beginning of the year 1812," said Bourmin, "I was hastening to Vilna, where my regiment was stationed. Arriving late one evening at one of the post-stations, I ordered the horses to be got ready as quickly as possible, when suddenly a terrible snowstorm came on, and the postmaster and drivers advised me to wait till it had passed over. I followed their advice, but an unaccountable uneasiness took possession of me: it seemed as if someone were pushing me forward. Meanwhile the snowstorm did not subside; I could endure it no longer, and again ordering out the horses, I started off in the midst of the storm. The driver conceived the idea of following the course of the river, which would shorten our journey by three versts. The banks were covered with snow: the driver drove past the place where we should have

come out upon the road, and so we found ourselves in an unknown part of the country.... The storm did not cease; I saw a light in the distance, and I ordered the driver to proceed towards it. We reached a village; in the wooden church there was a light. The church was open. Outside the railings stood several sledges, and people were passing in and out through the porch.

"This way! this way!" cried several voices.

"I ordered the driver to proceed.

"In the name of Heaven, where have you been loitering" said somebody to me. "The bride has fainted away; the pope does not know what to do, and we were just getting ready to go back. Get out as quickly as you can."

"I got out of the sledge without saying a word, and went into the church, which was feebly lit up by two or three tapers. A young girl was sitting on a bench in a dark corner of the church; another girl was rubbing her temples.

"Thank God!" said the latter, "you have come at last. You have almost killed the young lady."

"The old priest advanced towards me, and said:

"Do you wish me to begin?"

"Begin, begin, father," replied I, absently.

"The young girl was raised up. She seemed to me not at all bad-looking.... Impelled by an incomprehensible, unpardonable levity, I placed myself by her side in front of the pulpit; the priest hurried on; three men and a chambermaid supported the bride and only occupied themselves with her. We were married.

"Kiss each other!" said the witnesses to us.

"My wife turned her pale face towards me. I was about to kiss her, when she exclaimed: 'Oh! it is not he! it is not he!' and fell senseless.

"The witnesses gazed at me in alarm. I turned round and left the church without the least hindrance, flung myself into the kibitka and cried: 'Drive off!'

"My God!" exclaimed Maria Gavrilovna. "And you do not know what became of your poor wife?"

"I do not know," replied Bourmin; "neither do I know the name of the village where I was married, nor the poststation where I set out from. At that time I attached so little importance to my wicked prank, that

on leaving the church, I fell asleep, and did not awake till the next morning after reaching the third station. The servant, who was then with me, died during the campaign, so that I have no hope of ever discovering the woman upon whom I played such a cruel joke, and who is now so cruelly avenged."

"My God! my God!" cried Maria Gavrilovna, seizing him by the hand: "then it was you! And you do not recognize me?"

Bourmin turned pale--and threw himself at her feet.

[Footnote 1: A village about fifty miles from Moscow, and the scene of a sanguinary battle between the French and Russian forces during the invasion of Russia by Napoleon I.]

[Footnote 2: Griboiedoff.]

[Footnote 3: In "La Nouvelle Héloïse," by Jean-Jacques Rousseau.]



## THE WOLVES OF CERNOGRATZ

The Project Gutenberg eBook, *The Toys of Peace*, by Saki

"Are there any old legends attached to the castle?" asked Conrad of his sister. Conrad was a prosperous Hamburg merchant, but he was the one poetically-dispositioned member of an eminently practical family.

The Baroness Gruebel shrugged her plump shoulders.

"There are always legends hanging about these old places. They are not difficult to invent and they cost nothing. In this case there is a story that when any one dies in the castle all the dogs in the village and the wild beasts in forest howl the night long. It would not be pleasant to listen to, would it?"

"It would be weird and romantic," said the Hamburg merchant.

"Anyhow, it isn't true," said the Baroness complacently; "since we bought the place we have had proof that nothing of the sort happens. When the old mother-in-law died last springtime we all listened, but there was no

howling. It is just a story that lends dignity to the place without costing anything.”

“The story is not as you have told it,” said Amalie, the grey old governess. Every one turned and looked at her in astonishment. She was wont to sit silent and prim and faded in her place at table, never speaking unless some one spoke to her, and there were few who troubled themselves to make conversation with her. To-day a sudden volubility had descended on her; she continued to talk, rapidly and nervously, looking straight in front of her and seeming to address no one in particular.

“It is not when any one dies in the castle that the howling is heard. It was when one of the Cernogratz family died here that the wolves came from far and near and howled at the edge of the forest just before the death hour. There were only a few couple of wolves that had their lairs in this part of the forest, but at such a time the keepers say there would be scores of them, gliding about in the shadows and howling in chorus, and the dogs of the castle and the village and all the farms round would bay and howl in fear and anger at the wolf chorus, and as the soul of the dying one left its body a tree would crash down in the park. That is what happened when a Cernogratz died in his family castle. But for a stranger dying here, of course no wolf would howl and no tree would fall. Oh, no.”

There was a note of defiance, almost of contempt, in her voice as she said the last words. The well-fed, much-too-well dressed Baroness stared angrily at the dowdy old woman who had come forth from her usual and seemly position of effacement to speak so disrespectfully.

“You seem to know quite a lot about the von Cernogratz legends, Fraulein Schmidt,” she said sharply; “I did not know that family histories were among the subjects you are supposed to be proficient in.”

The answer to her taunt was even more unexpected and astonishing than the conversational outbreak which had provoked it.

“I am a von Cernogratz myself,” said the old woman, “that is why I know the family history.”

“You a von Cernogratz? You!” came in an incredulous chorus.

“When we became very poor,” she explained, “and I had to go out and give teaching lessons, I took another name; I thought it would be more in keeping. But my grandfather spent much of his time as a boy in this castle, and my father used to tell me many stories about it, and, of course, I knew all the family legends and stories. When one has nothing left to one but memories, one guards and dusts them with especial care. I little thought when I took service with you that I should one day come with you to the old home of my family. I could wish it had been anywhere else.”

There was silence when she finished speaking, and then the Baroness turned the conversation to a less embarrassing topic than family histories. But afterwards, when the old governess had slipped away quietly to her duties, there arose a clamour of derision and disbelief.

“It was an impertinence,” snapped out the Baron, his protruding eyes taking on a scandalised expression; “fancy the woman talking like that at our table. She almost told us we were nobodies, and I don’t believe a word of it. She is just Schmidt and nothing more. She has been talking to some of the peasants about the old Cernogratz family, and raked up their history and their stories.”

“She wants to make herself out of some consequence,” said the Baroness; “she knows she will soon be past work and she wants to appeal to our sympathies. Her grandfather, indeed!”

The Baroness had the usual number of grandfathers, but she never, never boasted about them.

“I dare say her grandfather was a pantry boy or something of the sort in the castle,” sniggered the Baron; “that part of the story may be true.”

The merchant from Hamburg said nothing; he had seen tears in the old woman’s eyes when she spoke of guarding her memories—or, being of an imaginative disposition, he thought he had.

“I shall give her notice to go as soon as the New Year festivities are over,” said the Baroness; “till then I shall be too busy to manage without her.”

But she had to manage without her all the same, for in the cold biting weather after Christmas, the old governess fell ill and kept to her room.

“It is most provoking,” said the Baroness, as her guests sat round the fire on one of the last evenings of the dying year; “all the time that she has been with us I cannot remember that she was ever seriously ill, too ill to go about and do her work, I mean. And now, when I have the house full, and she could be useful in so many ways, she goes and breaks down. One is sorry for her, of course, she looks so withered and shrunk, but it is intensely annoying all the same.”

“Most annoying,” agreed the banker’s wife, sympathetically; “it is the intense cold, I expect, it breaks the old people up. It has been unusually cold this year.”

“The frost is the sharpest that has been known in December for many years,” said the Baron.

“And, of course, she is quite old,” said the Baroness; “I wish I had given her notice some weeks ago, then she would have left before this happened to her. Why, Wappi, what is the matter with you?”

The small, woolly lapdog had leapt suddenly down from its cushion and crept shivering under the sofa. At the same moment an outburst of angry barking came from the dogs in the castle-yard, and other dogs could be heard yapping and barking in the distance.

“What is disturbing the animals?” asked the Baron.

And then the humans, listening intently, heard the sound that had roused the dogs to their demonstrations of fear and rage; heard a long-drawn whining howl, rising and falling, seeming at one moment leagues away, at others sweeping across the snow until it appeared to come from the foot of the castle walls. All the starved, cold misery of a frozen world, all the relentless hunger-fury of the wild, blended with other forlorn and haunting melodies to which one could give no name, seemed concentrated in that wailing cry.

“Wolves!” cried the Baron.

Their music broke forth in one raging burst, seeming to come from everywhere.

“Hundreds of wolves,” said the Hamburg merchant, who was a man of strong imagination.

Moved by some impulse which she could not have explained, the Baroness left her guests and made her way to the narrow, cheerless room where the old governess lay watching the hours of the dying year slip by. In spite of the biting cold of the winter night, the window stood open. With a scandalised exclamation on her lips, the Baroness rushed forward to close it.

“Leave it open,” said the old woman in a voice that for all its weakness carried an air of command such as the Baroness had never heard before from her lips.

“But you will die of cold!” she expostulated.

“I am dying in any case,” said the voice, “and I want to hear their music. They have come from far and wide to sing the death-music of my family. It is beautiful that they have come; I am the last von Cernogratz that will die in our old castle, and they have come to sing to me. Hark, how loud they are calling!”

The cry of the wolves rose on the still winter air and floated round the castle walls in long-drawn piercing wails; the old woman lay back on her couch with a look of long-delayed happiness on her face.

“Go away,” she said to the Baroness; “I am not lonely any more. I am one of a great old family . . .”



“I think she is dying,” said the Baroness when she had rejoined her guests; “I suppose we must send for a doctor. And that terrible howling! Not for much money would I have such death-music.”

“That music is not to be bought for any amount of money,” said Conrad.

“Hark! What is that other sound?” asked the Baron, as a noise of splitting and crashing was heard.

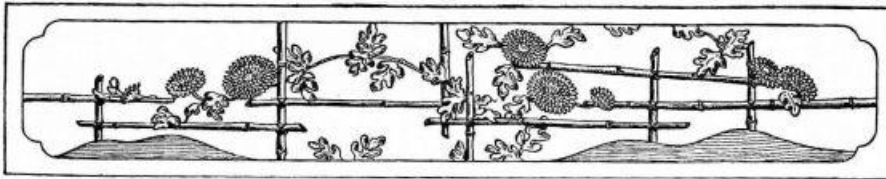
It was a tree falling in the park.

There was a moment of constrained silence, and then the banker’s wife spoke.

“It is the intense cold that is splitting the trees. It is also the cold that has brought the wolves out in such numbers. It is many years since we have had such a cold winter.”

The Baroness eagerly agreed that the cold was responsible for these things. It was the cold of the open window, too, which caused the heart failure that made the doctor’s ministrations unnecessary for the old Fraulein. But the notice in the newspapers looked very well—

“On December 29th, at Schloss Cernogratz, Amalie von Cernogratz, for many years the valued friend of Baron and Baroness Gruebel.”



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